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8 best ways to use it

Computer active

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From the Editor

It didn't take long for the Windows 10 problems to start arriving. We received our first email at 10.36am on 29 July from Mr R Roberts, who wanted to know why his download kept freezing. A week later, and the download delays had morphed into hardware failures, which were soon supplanted by agonising reboot loops.

Short of installing a hotline to Microsoft's support team, the best way we can help you is to publish fixes in *Computeractive*. I wish we could have included every email you sent us, but we'd have needed an issue thicker than the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*! However, we have tried to choose questions that represent a cross-section of the problems, so you may find that another reader's experience is similar to yours. We'll have more fixes over the next few months, so please keep your questions coming.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

P.S. You'll find more problems solved in our new book *The Definitive Guide to Windows 10*. See page 54 for more information.

THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

3 million
The number of UK homes and businesses that can now get 'super-fast' 24Mbps broadband – *p8*

35
Number of Flash flaws fixed by Adobe – *p14*

£180
The price of Acer's cheapest Cloudbook laptop – *p49*

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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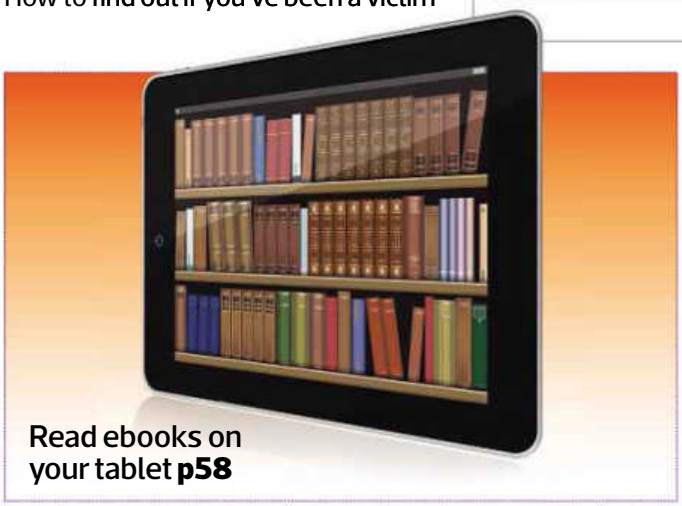

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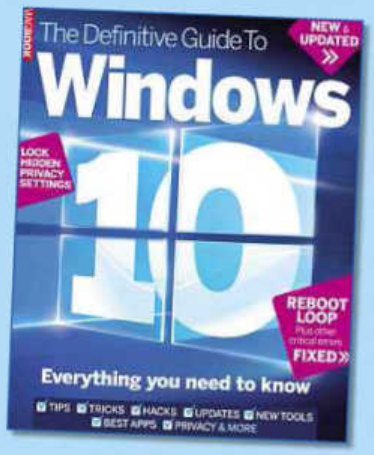
The Definitive Guide To Windows 10



Buy it now for £9.99 from www.snipca.com/17716

News

The top stories in the world of technology

Lenovo smuggles unremovable software on to computers

Lenovo has admitted using a feature to ensure that its software stays put on a Windows computer, even if the user has performed a clean install of the operating system.

This means that if Windows is reinstalled from scratch, the unwanted software is quietly added – without the user spotting it – when the computer next boots up.

Lenovo built a piece of code called the Lenovo Service Engine (LSE) into the firmware on the motherboard of laptops and desktop PCs made between October 2014 and April 2015.

This launches as soon as you turn on your PC, before Windows loads, making it extremely hard to remove.

It takes advantage of a feature called Windows Platform Binary Table (WPBT), a tool supported by Microsoft that is actually meant to help the installation of anti-theft software.

Lenovo was using it in a way it was never intended to be used. It's not clear whether other PC manufacturers have also been exploiting WPBT to install their own unremovable software.

LSE replaces a Windows file named Autchk.exe with its own version. This creates another two files - LenovoUpdate.exe and LenovoCheck.exe - which then allow further files to be downloaded once the computer connects to the internet.

LSE downloads a program called OneKey Optimizer which, Lenovo says, is used for "enhancing PC performance by updating firmware, drivers and pre-installed apps".

It also, rather ironically, scans "junk files" that harm your PC's performance.

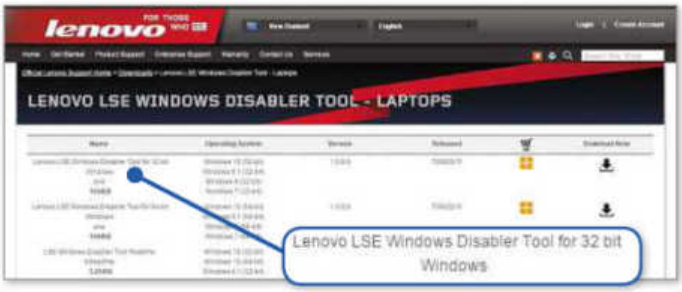
Over time LSE sends system data to a Lenovo server to help the company understand how people use its products. However, Lenovo claims this data can't be used to identify individuals.

Worse, LSE contains a security vulnerability that leaves PCs open to attack by hackers. To fix this, Lenovo released a 'Disabler' tool to remove LSE from laptops (www.snipca.com/17720, see screenshot left) and PCs (www.snipca.com/17721). The company "strongly recommends" that users update their computers using these tools.

Lenovo has also revealed which PCs and laptops are affected: www.snipca.com/17722. The list includes some Flex and Yoga notebooks. The company has said LSE will not be added to future Lenovo computers.

This is not the first time Lenovo has been caught installing software that posed a risk to users. In March this year, it was found that some laptops by the manufacturer came pre-installed with Superfish adware that could have allowed hackers to inject malicious adverts on to web pages.

Lenovo has since released instructions, in a PDF, on how to detect and remove Superfish: www.snipca.com/17723.



COMMENT

We can hardly believe that a few months after the Superfish scandal, Lenovo has been caught bundling more rubbish on to its PCs. The company now has a reputation for polluting its systems with the kind of junk that not only slows your PC, but also leaves you at risk of attack. After Superfish, the company said it would no longer add junk to its PC. But as this proves, PC manufacturers will bend the rules to boost the slim profits they make from hardware. More hidden nasties will be exposed soon, we fear.

You'll like this...
Virgin will offer free public Wi-Fi this autumn (www.snipca.com/17719)

... but not this
Police have investigated their first case of 'cyber flashing' (www.snipca.com/17718)

‘Critical’ IE flaw fixed as users ponder switch to Edge

Microsoft has released an emergency security patch for Internet Explorer to fix a ‘critical’ flaw.

It arrived in mid-August outside of the company’s normal Patch Tuesday schedule, which is the second Tuesday of every month.

The update, called CVE-2015-2502, fixes a vulnerability that allows hackers to perform remote code execution, letting them take over a victim’s PC if they visit boobytrapped websites containing malware.

In its Security Bulletin (www.snipca.com/17706) Microsoft said a hacker could then “install programs; view, change, or delete data; or create new accounts with full user rights”.

The flaw exists in IE7 through to IE11, the latest and

final version of the veteran browser. You can find out which version of IE you’re using at www.snipca.com/17707.

It affects IE on computers running Windows Vista, 7, 8 and 10, even though the default browser on the last of these is Microsoft Edge, which is not at risk.

The update will be applied automatically in Windows 10, as it will in Windows 7 and 8 if you have ‘automatic updating’ switched on. To check, follow Microsoft’s instructions at www.snipca.com/17709.

The update is the latest of a series of patches for Internet Explorer this year, the biggest of which came in February when 41 flaws were fixed (see Protect Your Tech, Issue 444).

While Microsoft will continue to provide security fixes for IE11 until 2023, when support for Windows 8.1 ends, it will hope that the majority of users will switch to Edge within the next year.

Are you planning to switch from IE to Edge? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Time to bin your router? Google launches its own ‘fast and safe’ device

Google has launched its own Wi-Fi router, called OnHub (https://on.google.com/hub), promising to end the signal failures and complicated set-up that it claims plagues other models.

However, it’s only available

in the US, priced $200 (around £125). Google hasn’t said whether it will sell the device in the UK yet, but there’s no reason why it wouldn’t.

Made by router manufacturer TP-Link, the OnHub is an attractive, cylindrical unit. You control it using an Android or iOS app, rather than through a website, as is common with most routers.

Despite the OnHub lacking any external antennae, Google claims it will offer a “fast, secure and easy-to-use” Wi-Fi connection.

On its blog (www.snipca.com/17705) Google says: “A unique [internal] antenna design and smart software keep working in the background, automatically adjusting OnHub to avoid interference and keep your network at peak performance”.

The router offers standard features such as automatic Wi-Fi channel switching and the option to prioritise traffic to a particular device.

But unlike many routers it provides support for Bluetooth Smart Ready and Weave, which are technological standards designed to be used by web-connected devices in the home, such as thermostats and smoke alarms.

As these devices become an essential part of the ‘smart’ home, Google will hope the OnHub is seen by the public as the best way to control them.

IN BRIEF

PLAY 1,000 SPECTRUM GAMES ON NEW CONSOLE

A new console containing 1,000 ZX Spectrum games from the Eighties is now on sale. Described as a ‘micro-controller computer’, the Sinclair ZX Spectrum Vega costs £99.99 and connects to your TV’s USB port. Its design is based on the 1982 model of the ZX Spectrum, famous for its rubber keys. Investment for the Vega came from a crowdfunding campaign that raised over £150,000. You can buy it from FunstockRetro.co.uk at www.snipca.com/17710, where you’ll also see every game it contains – from 1999 to Zzzz.

CHECK PHONE COVERAGE ACROSS THE UK

Ofcom’s new Mobile Coverage Checker (www.ofcom.org.uk/mobile-coverage) lets you see how good phone coverage is across the UK, displaying the results down to 100m^2 on a map. You can narrow the search by selecting a network, signal type (voice calls, 3G or 4G) and location (indoor or outdoor).

Tomorrow’s world

“Herb gardeners who work extra get thyme and a half”. That’s a computer’s favourite joke according to scientists at Stanford University, who built a program to rank over 400 puns. But that doesn’t mean computers will soon be able to write their own jokes. The researchers say that while it shouldn’t be too hard to build a program that can improve puns, creating jokes is “still very challenging”.

IN BRIEF

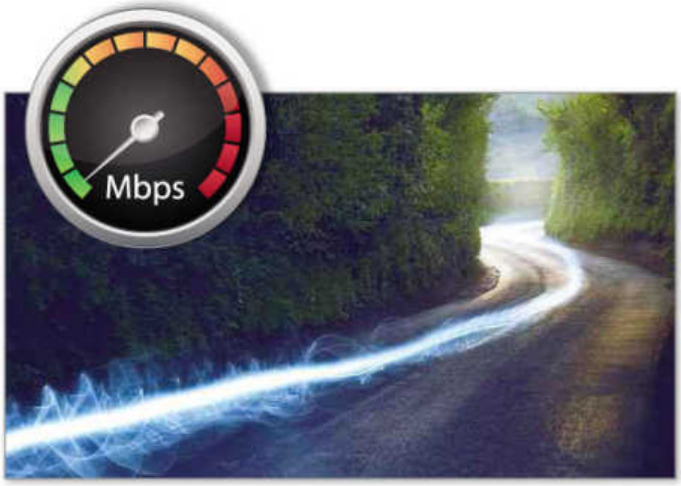
UPDATE YOUR KINDLE WITH NEW FONT

Amazon is upgrading several models of the Kindle with a new font and other features designed to make ebooks easier to read. Version 5.6.5 of the Kindle software brings Amazon's own Bookerly font to the Voyage, Touch, the seventh-generation Kindle and previous versions of the Paperwhite. It was first introduced on the 2015 Kindle Paperwhite. Download the software from www.snipca.com/17643. We'll explain how to use the new features in our next issue.

TESCO LAUNCHES £99 WINDOWS 10 TABLET

Tesco has released one of the first budget tablets to come pre-installed with Windows 10. The 8in Connect costs £99 (you can buy it for just £49.50 if you've got enough Clubcard vouchers). It has 32GB of storage and a resolution of 1280x800 pixels. Microsoft has revamped the Windows 10 interface for small tablets. We will review the Connect soon.

It's broadband or bust say rural businesses



Rural businesses have said they are suffering as a result of poor broadband speeds, and could go bust if things don't improve.

Their warning came after the Government announced that three million homes and businesses in the UK could now get speeds of 24Mbps, deemed to be 'super fast'.

Figures released by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) show that 2,905,764 premises are now covered by the Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) scheme. This aims to deliver super-fast speeds across 95 per cent of the country by 2017, and "basic" broadband (2Mbps) by 2016.

BDUK is doing this by spending £530m to fund broadband in areas where it's not commercially viable for companies to do so. BT has invested £415m to win the right to install the broadband – and subsequently collect the profits.

Culture Secretary John Whittingdale hailed the news as "a huge achievement". But many small rural companies say that they are missing out.

John Allan, chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses, said: "For thousands of businesses in rural areas super-fast broadband speeds are not available and it's holding them back from growing and investing".

Sarah Lee from the Countryside Alliance agreed, slamming the UK's rural coverage as "patchy and unreliable".

Other representatives of rural areas expressed dismay. Speaking to BBC Radio 4 Steve Horner, a parish councillor for Yarcombe in Devon, said: "We've got 50 small businesses in the parish, and if those small businesses don't have broadband, they won't survive".

The Government shows where it has delivered super-fast broadband on this Google Map: www.snipca.com/17660. You can also use its postcode checker: http://gosuperfastchecker.culture.gov.uk.

Do you think enough is being done to deliver fast broadband to rural areas? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

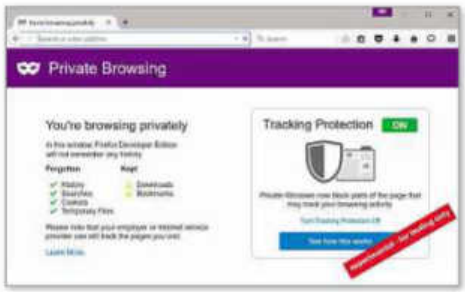
Firefox wants to stop sites tracking you online

Mozilla is set to test new private-browsing features in its Firefox browser that promises to block the ability of websites to record what you do online.

The experimental 'Private Browsing' mode (see screenshot right) is being added to the 'pre-beta' versions of Firefox, which developers use to test web technology that's cutting-edge, and therefore may contain serious flaws.

These tend to be fixed before the version is released to the public.

The new privacy mode could be more secure than those offered by Chrome, Internet Explorer and Microsoft's new browser Edge. Mozilla says that in those browsers, using private mode only works as "local" protection, which means it prevents other people using the same PC from seeing what you do online.



But, Mozilla says, privacy mode should mean blocking "website elements that could be used to record user behaviour across sites" and collect data "without your knowledge".

Mozilla said on its blog (www.snipca.com/17665): "Our hypothesis is that when you open a Private Browsing window in Firefox you're sending a signal that you want more control over your privacy than current private browsing experiences actually provide".

Mozilla's move will upset companies that track how people browse the web in order to show them more relevant adverts.

It's not known when the features may appear in the public versions of Firefox. The latest version, Firefox 40, uses Google's Safe Browsing service to warn you when you're about to visit a site containing dodgy downloads (see Protect Your Tech, page 14).

Question of the Fortnight

Will Google Alphabet make you live longer?

The surprise restructuring of Google may lead to medical breakthroughs

Type 'how can I live longer?' into Google and you'll get 245 million results, many of them linking to websites with dubious suggestions for prolonging your life. That approach won't add years to your life, but the recent creation of Alphabet may.

Alphabet is Google's new parent company. It sits at the head of a restructured organisation designed to give increased freedom to the smaller, more experimental parts of the business. Writing on the Alphabet website (https://abc.xyz), Larry Page (who co-founded Google with Sergey Brin) admits these projects may seem "speculative or even strange". But he's confident these 'alpha' bets (hence the name) will pay off long term, both in terms of the company's financial fortunes and the improvement in people's lives.

THE FACTS

- Google has created a parent company called Alphabet
- Google hopes this will provide more freedom to the company's cutting-edge projects
- One of these projects is Calico, a biotech company that fights age-related disease

Google's more adventurous projects to flourish. Page calls these 'moon shots', referring to John F Kennedy's ambition of sending a man to the Moon.

> "One of Google's projects is Calico, a biotech company dedicated to extending the human lifespan"

The most important thing to know about the change is that it won't affect your everyday use of Google. The company wants to continue to optimise the money it makes from advertising, so it won't neglect the services these ads appear on – search, Gmail, YouTube and so on.

But fast-forward several years, and you may start to see benefits from this restructuring. That's because Alphabet should allow

In 1962 Kennedy famously said: "We choose to go to the moon... not because it is easy, but because it is hard". Page is less eloquent, though just as determined: "We are still trying to do things other people think are crazy but we are super-excited about".

What's all this got to do with living longer? Well, one of Google's moon shots is Calico (www.calicolabs.com), a biotech company dedicated to extending the human lifespan. It conducts research into age-related diseases and recently teamed up with AncestryDNA (http://dna.ancestry.com) to examine why some people's genes help them live longer.

Another part of Google that could thrive is the Life Sciences division of Google X, a top-secret experimental laboratory. It has already made a 'smart' contact lens that measures the glucose level of people with diabetes, and is developing the Liftware spoon (www.liftware.com), which reduces tremors as Parkinson's patients eat food. Independent from the big money-making parts of Google, Calico and Google X should be able to conduct more radical work.

This approach is part of a strategy that Page and Brin hope will make Google a different type of company – one that sets out to improve humanity, not just accumulate vast amounts of money. You can see this in some of their other moon shots, such as the development of drones to provide supplies to areas hit by natural disasters.

Many people doubt the sincerity of Google's founders. They say that the company's original 'don't be evil' motto has been undermined by the aggressive accumulation of users' personal information in order to show targeted adverts.

Google would argue that the more cash they make from advertising, the more they can invest in innovation. From any other company, that claim would be scoffed at. You might be forgiven for doubting not only the company's intentions, but also its capacity to invent life-changing technology.

But Google's track record is so impressive that it's tempting to give them the benefit of the doubt. From search to YouTube, from Android to Chrome, Google has defined how we use the web. Maybe it could also help us use the web for longer too.

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind
Email: letters@computeractive.co.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/computeractive
Twitter: @ComputerActive
www.twitter.com/computeractive

Lukewarm about Windows 10

Eighteen months ago, I made the switch from XP to Windows 8.1. It took a bit of getting used to (who needs tiles?), but once I had it set up with normal Desktop icons I was quite happy. Then I decided to go for Windows 10. The upgrade took time, but I was very pleased to see a very similar Desktop.

I find the Start button a waste of time because a simple right-click on the Windows icon brings up most things I need. The Edge browser is my main concern because it currently does not support extensions. Also, I've been unable to set the 'Home' option to anything other the standard Microsoft screen, which includes my news feed. I would love to get rid of it.

I switched off Cortana straight away because I don't want my computer speaking to me. I may sound like a stick-in-the-mud, but as long as I can use email, spreadsheets, WordPerfect, and the internet, I'm quite happy.

Keith Pearson

Microsoft gave me 'shoddy' Windows 10 advice

I have a Lenovo Miix 3 tablet and last week I upgraded it to Windows 10. When I tried to open Cortana, I saw the message telling me that using it was "against company policy" in my region (which is the UK).

I checked online and read that one way around this problem is to change the settings to American 'English'. I wasn't happy with this, so I contacted Windows Technical Support (www.snipca.com/17568) on 3 August. The advisor spent 30 minutes changing my settings, then gave up and raised my query to 'Level 2', saying I would be called at noon on 4 August. On 6 August Level 2 rang me, took control of my tablet for two hours, eventually changed everything to American English and told me it was fixed. I could have done that in two minutes following the advice on Microsoft's forums! And the advice was not what I requested anyway. Using the US settings causes all sorts of problems in the UK.

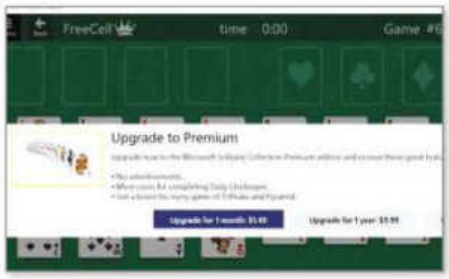
Another problem with the upgrade was that the Mail app did not sync and gave the error message 0x80070032. The Level 2 advisor told me the problem was caused by a clash between Windows and Norton firewalls. He then assured me he had fixed this and the call ended.

Imagine my horror the next time I logged in to discover that all he had done was uninstall my Norton Security Suite. So, far from fixing everything, he'd left me at the mercy of all sorts of threats on the web. I'm a silver surfer, and there must be a large number like me who rely on the technical expertise of so-called experts. For an organisation like Microsoft to sanction such shoddy customer service is sad indeed.

John Whittaker

Adverts in Solitaire feel 'intrusive'

I totally agree with your comment about Microsoft "plastering" Solitaire with adverts in Windows 10 (see News, Issue 456, page 6). I don't object to Microsoft trying to make money out of a free operating system – that's fair enough. If people want to pay to earn more coins in Solitaire, then let them. But adverts feel like an intrusion into your personal space. Having to pay to remove them is a deeply cynical move by Microsoft. At the moment I can just about tolerate the 30-second videos. But what happens if that same Microsoft accountant you refer to thinks he can make more money by making the adverts longer and more



irritating? Let's face it, more people will pay to avoid one-minute adverts than 30-second ones, and so on. Where do you stop? Perhaps it's time I got my dusty pack of cards from the kitchen drawer and played Solitaire for real – without adverts!

Clive Formby

'Tablet rage' is the new road rage

In Issue 456, you asked whether smartphones have ruined the UK's manners. I say yes, but would also like to include tablets in the question. Recently, I witnessed my first experience of 'tablet rage'. I was in a packed lift coming out of a train station on my way to work. As sometimes happens, one selfish person continued to watch a film on his iPad despite the lift being very crowded. This particular person got very angry when a woman in front of him accidentally nudged her elbow against his precious iPad – despite the fact that it was entirely

'Undesirable' types will use drones

Stuart Andrews as always has identified another horror of the modern world: drones (The Final Straw, Issue 456). A recent visit to a park was ruined by flying drones. The people flying them were – how can I put this delicately? – rather undesirable. They were loud, inconsiderate and probably drunk.

I hope I'm wrong, but as drones get cheaper I fear they will become popular with people who like to intimidate others in public with their bad behaviour. These are the same types who play loud music from their cars, let their pitbulls rampage everywhere, and who simply don't care

how they are regarded by other people. Everyone must know people like this – layabouts who are proud of how antisocial they are. We will soon need 'drone asbos'. Drasbos, maybe?

Richard Coogan

his fault for trying to use the device when there was clearly no room. I told him he was being selfish and unreasonable, and he just harrumphed and looked the other way. Says it all really.

Douglas Liddle

Kids with phones ruined my cinema trip

How timely your 'Question of the Fortnight' ('Have smartphones ruined our manners?') was in Issue 456 because in that same week, Benedict Cumberbatch complained about theatre-goers filming him on their devices. I know where Mr Cumberbatch is coming from.

My own personal gripe is people checking their phones in the cinema. I recently took my granddaughter to see (the brilliant) *Inside Out*. She's too young for a smartphone, but it would seem that other parents are less responsible because the cinema was full of kids doing what kids do on smartphones. I even saw one take a selfie with their friend – during the film!

Where Mr Cumberbatch saw red lights, I could see the glow of phone screens, along with constant giggling. I think cinemas should frisk people as they go in, confiscating phones for collection later. But then I suppose that would infringe their 'rights', and we can't have that.

James Fenwick

Amazon customer-friendly? Forget it!

Like other readers, I think Amazon has gone from 'Earth's most customer-centric company' (their words, not mine) to being a nightmare to deal with. My account was hacked recently and I alerted Amazon to the fact that someone was trying to commit fraud in my name. I reset my password and deleted all payment methods, but Amazon kept sending me automated emails asking me to reset my password.

After four new passwords I managed to speak to a human in one of their call centres, only to find I was back in the reset-password loop. I've tried to raise issues with them about the fraud, but all I get are automated replies. I've emailed their UK Managing Director and Jeff Bezos: no replies from him. I've even raised a dispute with the Resolver service operated by MoneySavingExpert (www.moneysavingexpert.com/site/resolver), but Amazon will not co-operate with it. Customer-centric? I think not.

Steve Hoselitz

In defence of Amazon

Having read the disgruntled letters recently regarding Amazon, I would like to give my view. I live in a small town, which doesn't have department stores like some bigger towns and cities – so I do most of my shopping online. I've used Amazon for years, and any problems I've had have been quickly fixed by them, at no cost to myself.

I don't use Amazon Prime because this wouldn't be viable for me. I do always write reviews because Amazon is a marketplace and I believe a seller who has sent good-quality items deserves praise. I'm also quick to contact Marketplace sellers if I'm not pleased, and have always had a rapid response.

As for the £20 minimum delivery charge, there are many large stores that offer free delivery or discounts, but only if you reach a minimum spend. This is sometimes as much as £50. Because most of the goods I order from Amazon are over £20, I don't have any qualms about its minimum delivery charges. Prices can be cheaper on other sites, but not delivery, so I will stick with Amazon.

Sandra Payne

STAR LETTER

Windows 10: My review of *your* review

If you will allow me, I'd like to 'review' your Definitive Review of Windows 10 (Issue 456). Let's begin at the end – with the overall verdict. Four stars out of five seems fair to me, but you could almost have given two scores: three stars for Windows 7 users, and five for Windows 8 users. This would be to reflect the improvement on each respective operating system.

If I had my way, I'd keep using Windows 7 forever. At the age of 78, I can't imagine ever getting to know an operating system as well as I know Windows 7. You should have made more of the advantages of familiarity in your review. I'm not just saying I think Windows 7 is better than Windows 10 because I've been using it longer. I just think it's better, full stop.

But I have to agree with your disparaging comments about Windows 8. If anything, you've been too kind. You say it's the second-worst operating system ever. No, it is *the* worst. It defeated me. I sold my Windows 8 laptop within weeks of buying it.

You're right to say that Windows 10 doesn't "overload" you with features. But four stars in this category was a bit generous. Cortana is pointless, as is Edge without extensions, so the only decent "new" features are the returning old ones (such as the Start menu). But five stars is spot on for speed and stability. I don't want to jinx it, but Windows 10 has yet to crash on me (quick, give me some wood to touch).

I end my email with a request. Please can you publish a catch-up review in six months. As you say in your conclusion, Windows 10 may evolve "radically" over the next year, so we need to know whether Microsoft will make things better and worse. Those waiting to upgrade will find that useful.

Stephen Whitelaw

CA says Stephen makes an excellent point. Because Microsoft will be continuously updating Windows 10, we'll never stop assessing it. We'll always tell you how to tweak settings to stay safe, how to use new features, and whether an update has made Windows 10 better or worse.

The Star Letter writer wins a *Computeractive* mug!

Consumeractive

What can I do if an upgrade breaks my sat-nav?

Q I updated the software for my Garmin NUVI 1490 sat-nav in April. The following day the traffic-alert system didn't work. The unit came with a lifetime subscription and map updates. Garmin admitted there was a problem, but asked me to be patient while it was fixed. What can I do if I'm not getting the service I paid for?

Paul Atkinson

A If a software or firmware upgrade causes problems, then its developer is legally responsible for fixing the problem. In Paul's case, this means Garmin, which has accepted responsibility. But the bigger question is how long is a 'lifetime' when it refers to a device? We've asked Garmin to tell us how long it considers a lifetime to be.

The problem is that the NUVI 1490 is now quite old, having been launched in 2009. Manufacturers often reduce or stop support for older models when newer devices are released to the market. You can still use the product, but if things go wrong, you're on your own.

However, Garmin has given Paul a new upgraded sat-nav, which is working well. But that leaves the 'lifetime' question. If Garmin comes back to us, we'll let you know.

CASE ONGOING

Why won't BT treat me like other new customers?

Q I've been a BT customer for six years, but my Home Hub is getting very hot and the lights keep going out. I'm on a rolling 30-day contract and each month I believe I'm a new customer. Yet BT won't give me a free replacement as it does other new customers. It says the Hub is my property so it's up to me to repair or replace it. I'd appreciate any advice you can give me.

Sara Ward

A There's one way Sara may get a more favourable response – tell BT she wants to end her contract. Because ISPs don't want to lose your business, they'll often bend over backwards to keep a customer happy, sometimes offering discounts you'd never get any other way.

Sara is annoyed because she thinks she's not being treated fairly. But whether or not BT sees her as a 'new customer' isn't the issue. What matters is the small print in her contract.

If a customer doesn't sign a new contract and doesn't move to another ISP, they'll automatically be placed on a rolling 30-day contract. This ensures they don't lose their internet connection, and allows them the freedom to change to another ISP. However, 30-day contracts are very basic and offer few extras. BT's contract, for example, says it doesn't have to supply a router. Few ISPs will agree to replace a router for free on these type of contracts. You'll often find that you have to pay for your own.

Therefore, BT isn't doing anything illegal or unusual, and so we don't feel justified in contacting the company. But Sara definitely should. The fear of a departing customer can have a strange effect on companies, especially at a time when broadband deals are so competitive (Sky, for example, has just launched a package which is free for 12 months). If she tells BT she's had enough and wants to leave, she may be pleasantly surprised by what the company offers her.

CASE CLOSED

Can I get a replacement after a failed repair?

Q My LG G3 phone keeps overheating and shutting down. It's already been repaired once for this and another time because the screen had a crack. I recently read in *Computeractive* that the new Consumer Rights Act entitles customers to a refund after one failed repair. However, LG refuses to replace the phone or refund me. Can you help me?

Nizar Jafferbhoy

A Yes we can. Nizar is right to say that the new Consumer Rights Act gives customers a refund after one failed repair, but that doesn't come into force until 1 October.

However, we believe Nizar is entitled to a new phone – or a pro-rata refund calculated according to how long he's already used the phone – because the current Sale of Goods Act (SOGA) still works in his favour. Although SOGA doesn't specify how many repairs a customer has to put up with, two repairs – even if they're for different problems – is considered ample opportunity for a company make a device "fit for purpose".

SOGA also states that repairs mustn't cause the customer "significant inconvenience". Nizar says his phone shuts down for a week at a time when it overheats. To us that counts as being significantly inconvenienced. We've told LG why we believe he's entitled to a replacement and hope to update you soon.

CASE ONGOING

We stand up for your legal rights

Contact us so we can investigate your case

Email: consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk
Write: Consumeractive, Computeractive, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD
Please include both your phone number and address.
Unfortunately, we can't reply to all your letters.

Tee'd off about poor battery life – what can I do?

Q **The SkyGolf SkyCaddie GPS watch (www.snipca.com/17619) I bought for £169 around 18 months ago is faulty – the battery won't keep a charge (it is meant to last 10 hours). I believe it's 'inherently' faulty, but SkyGolf has given me conflicting information about how it'll help. What are my rights?**

Jim White

A Jim is entitled to have the Li-ion battery replaced if it is inherently faulty. But unless the battery explodes or catches fire, Jim will have to prove that the fault has existed from when he bought the watch, and isn't the result of wear and tear or accidental damage. Jim pointed out that many people have complained about the battery life online (and this is true – see SkyGolf's support forum for the watch: www.snipca.com/17622), but legally this kind of evidence is considered 'hearsay'. He won't be able to rely on this as proof that the battery is faulty.

Jim says SkyGolf insisted that the battery is an integral part of the watch and can't be replaced. But that doesn't mean the company can't give him a new watch. SkyGolf did suggest a number of ways he might fix the battery problem and promised – via an online chat – that it would replace the watch if these suggested fixes don't work. That sounds like a fair deal, but Jim says this offer has since been rescinded, and he's not sure why. It may be that the person who made the offer lacked the authority to do so. We've emailed SkyGolf to see if it will honour its offer of a replacement device, explaining that the transcript of the online chat transcript is proof the offer was made.

If you need to get in touch with SkyGolf, which is based in Haddenham in Buckinghamshire, you'll find contact details at www.snipca.com/17621. For more help try the support forums at (https://clubsg.skygolf.com/forums/support), which are categorised according to type of product.

CASE ONGOING

THIS WILL COME IN USEFUL

Official security blogs and updates

Adobe (Flash)
https://blogs.adobe.com/psirt

Apple
www.snipca.com/17572

Avast
https://blog.avast.com

AVG
http://now.avg.com

Avira
http://blog.avira.com

Bitdefender
www.hotforsecurity.com

Bullguard
www.bullguard.com/blog

Cyber Streetwise
www.cyberstreetwise.com/blog

Eset
www.welivesecurity.com

F-Secure
http://safeandsavvy.f-secure.com

Google
http://googleonlinesecurity.blogspot.co.uk

Kaspersky
https://blog.kaspersky.co.uk

LastPass
https://blog.lastpass.com

Lookout
https://blog.lookout.com

McAfee
https://blogs.mcafee.com

Malwarebytes
https://blog.malwarebytes.org

Microsoft
http://blogs.technet.com/b/msrc

Mozilla (Firefox)
https://blog.mozilla.org/security

Oracle (Java)
https://blogs.oracle.com/security

Sophos
https://nakedsecurity.sophos.com

Symantec
www.snipca.com/17571

Trend Micro
http://blog.trendmicro.com

Webroot
www.webroot.com/blog

Protect Your Tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Yet more Flash Player flaws

What happened?

Adobe released a mammoth security patch containing 35 fixes for its beleaguered Flash Player, as explained in the company's Security Bulletin: www.snipca.com/17592. All but one of the vulnerabilities fixed by this patch can be exploited by hackers to remotely access computers, although there's no evidence this has happened. It affects Flash on Windows, Mac OS X and Linux.

What should you do?

Adobe won't like us for suggesting this, but you should consider living life without Flash. Frankly, we've lost patience with the plug-in, and we wouldn't blame you for removing it (use Adobe's own uninstaller at www.snipca.com/17594).

But this option comes with consequences. Many websites still use Flash, so removing it will prevent some online videos from playing. If you want to give Flash a reprieve, download the latest version from https://get.adobe.com/flashplayer, then double-check you have the latest version by going to www.snipca.com/17593 and clicking Check Now (see screenshot). Flash is automatically updated in Google's browser Chrome, Microsoft Edge for Windows 10, and Internet Explorer 10 and 11 for Windows 8.1 – though we still recommend you check.

Windows and Mac users should make sure they have installed version 18.0.0.232 (or higher), while Linux users should update to version 11.2.202.508 (or higher). These are the latest fixed versions – at the time of writing, at least. Flash flaws are being exposed so frequently that it may have been updated again in the time between *Computeractive* going to press, and you reading this!

Finally, consider turning on 'Click to Play' in your browser, which asks for your approval before allowing Flash to play. Learn how to do this in Chrome, IE, Opera, Firefox and Safari on Graham Cluley's excellent security blog: www.snipca.com/17595.

New tools

Firefox 40

www.mozilla.org/firefox

Last year, Firefox boosted its security by introducing warnings that appear when you try to download a malicious file. Now, in the browser's 40th version – the first built especially for Windows 10 – it tells you when you're about to visit a website containing "unwanted software" (see screenshot). This could be malware that hackers use to remotely access your PC, but also adware that makes "undesirable" changes to your settings.

As Mozilla explains in its Security Blog (www.snipca.com/17577), Firefox uses Google's Safe Browsing service to check the safety of sites (see Issue 456's New Tools for more on this). In doing so, Firefox sends Google some data about sites and files it blocked as you browsed the web. Mozilla acknowledges that some people will be uneasy about this, and explains in its blog how to disable the blocking, but we think that would be an over-reaction.

Firefox should update to version 40 automatically. You can check by following the instructions at www.snipca.com/17583.

ScamWatch

READERS WARN READERS

Fraud refund? Nope, a scam

Recently, I got an email claiming to be from Action Fraud saying I could get a refund because a 'suspect' had been caught. I was a victim of fraud a few years back, so the email did appear convincing. But the source address of the email (**actionfraud999@gmail.com**) didn't look right, so I checked with Action Fraud (www.actionfraud.police.uk), and they said they only ever email people using **contact@actionfraud.police.uk**. They knew about the email scam and also told me that the perpetrators are phoning people on withheld numbers. So be warned everyone!

Hugh Shaw

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Computer active

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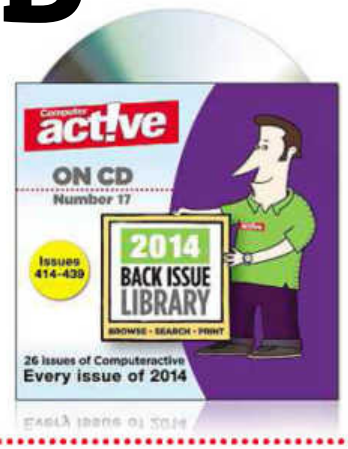
Computeractive 2014 Back Issue CD

There are fewer than 50 copies left on Amazon at **www.snipca.com/14981** (or search for **'computeractive cd'**)



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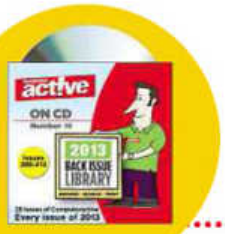

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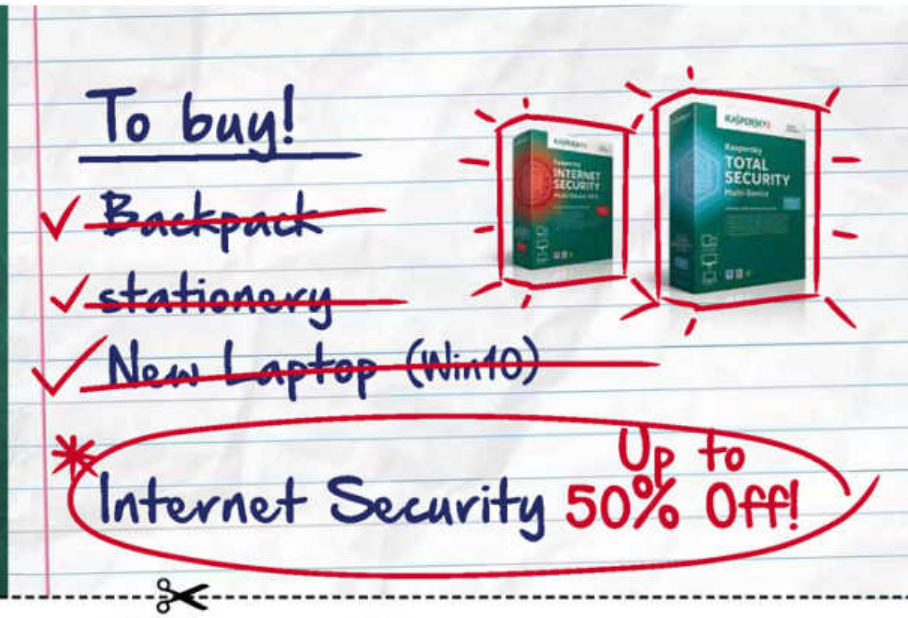

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Best Free Software

Brilliant new programs that won't cost you anything

OFFICE SUITE

LibreOffice 5

www.libreoffice.org
What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

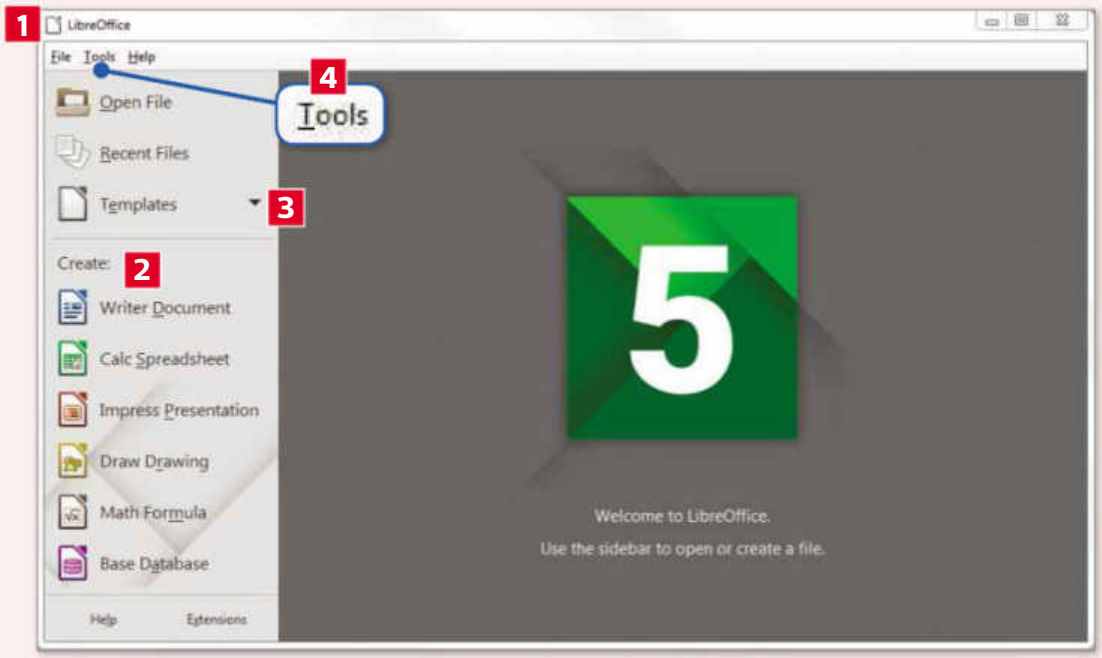
Last year, the best free alternative to Microsoft Office came ninth in our rundown of best free programs of all time (see Issue 433) – but it'd probably rank higher now.

This isn't just down to the great new design and features in this new release; it's also because of Windows 10. Those of you struggling to make your trusty old paid-for Office tools work smoothly in the new OS are well advised to try this program instead. It's open source so it'll always be free, and it's created by an active, ever-helpful community. Of course, there are other free Office alternatives, including Office Online (https://office.live.com) and Google's Docs and Sheets (www.snipca.com/17618). However, despite what many tech companies seem to assume, we don't all want to do everything online.

So what does LibreOffice 5 have to offer? There's powerful new import and export options that all but wipe out format-compatibility problems with other programs, notably Office. The spreadsheet tool, Calc, is now far more sophisticated, offering image cropping and conditional formatting, among other new functions.

LibreOffice might be big (211MB for the installer alone), but it's still much smaller than Office, and unlike Office there's a portable version that you can run on any PC without installing. It even has an Android app (www.snipca.com/17620) that turns your phone and tablet into remote controls for slideshows and presentations.

To get the main installer, click Download Now, and then click Download Version 5.0.0 on the page that opens (www.snipca.com/17613). From this page you can also download the source code, an extensive offline help guide and a brand new version for Linux. After downloading the installer (which doesn't contain any junk) you're redirected to a donation page, but you're not obliged to pay. LibreOffice is fee-free and advert-free, and we don't begrudge its appeal for funds.



1 Unlike Office, LibreOffice has an all-inclusive window where you can access all the suite's components. You can also open component programs separately via Start.

2 Use the Create menu to start a new project. For example, click Writer Document to create a new document. Find more options under New in the File menu.

3 Click the Templates dropdown arrow to access and edit templates for Writer documents, Calc spreadsheets, Impress spreadsheets and Draw designs.

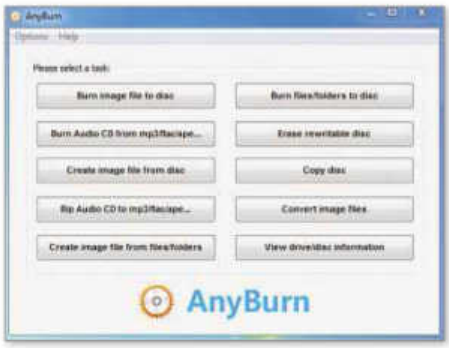
4 The Tools menu contains loads of goodies including macros (automated tasks) and extensions, such as a French dictionary and Wikipedia article publisher.

CD/DVD BURNER

Portable AnyBurn

www.snipca.com/17737

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10



Windows has a few built-in CD/DVD-burning tools, but they're basic and scattered throughout the OS. At the other extreme, pay-for burning suites, such as Nero, are often too bloated (and expensive) for many users' needs. Neatly occupying the happy medium territory is AnyBurn. It's a free portable application – you don't need to install it, so it won't add any unnecessary junk to your computer. You can even unzip it to a USB stick and use it on any PC. The tool has been updated to work with Windows 10.

AnyBurn is a mini-suite of useful, easy-to-use, disc-related tools, all available from the main interface. You can burn an image file (ISO) to disc, create audio CDs, make an ISO, rip CDs to MP3, create a disc image from a selection of files or folders, make a basic data disc and erase, copy or convert discs and more. It supports CD, DVD and Blu-ray.

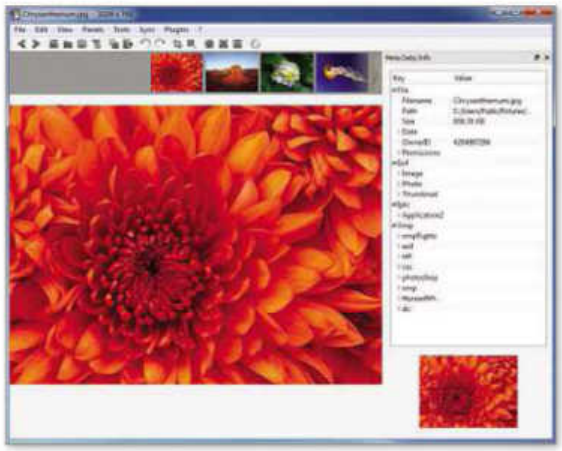


PHOTO TOOLS

Nomacs

www.snipca.com/17733

What you need: Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8/8.1 or 10

There are loads of free photo tools around, but few are as straightforward as Nomacs. Essentially a photo viewer, Nomacs can open a wide range of formats, including RAW and PSD (Photoshop) files. You can view information about your images, including GPS coordinates, and perform quick improvements, such as rotating, resizing and adjusting brightness, contrast, exposure and so on. Better still, it lets you perform tasks on batches of photos all at once, including resizing, renaming, converting to other formats and more.

WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software to use

How do I convert PDFs into editable Word documents?

Q I'm currently doing some charity work and I often have forms to work on. These are PDFs and I am unable to edit them in any way. Can you please tell me the best, safe software – preferably free – which will enable me to convert these PDFs to Word? I am using Windows 7 Professional and Office 2007.

Bob Bright

A There are a number of different options available – all are free, so try them out to see which one suits you best. Rather than convert the PDFs to another format, you can edit them using LibreOffice (www.libreoffice.org, see opposite page). Open your PDF in LibreOffice Draw, use the Text Box tool on the top toolbar to insert text wherever you need to on the page, and select 'Export to PDF' when you're done.

If you'd prefer to convert to Word, you may lose some formatting but, as you've suggested, it would make your documents editable. One way to do this is to download a tool like 'Free PDF to Word Doc Converter' (www.snipca.com/17725, see screenshot), which is a bit basic, but it's free and doesn't come with any junk. If you'd rather not install anything on your PC, you can use a free online converter, such as Nitro (www.pdftoword.com) – just upload your PDF, enter your email address and the converted Word file will be sent to you. Results are very good, but it's worth checking to make sure you're happy with the terms of Nitro's privacy policy (www.snipca.com/17729).

Do you need our advice on what software to use?
Just email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

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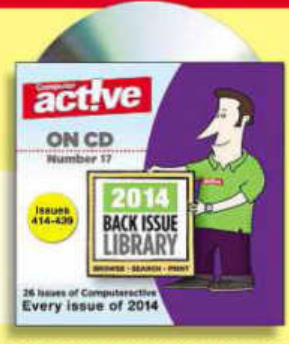


Reviews

New products tested by our experts

LAPTOP-TABLET | **£250** from www.snipca.com/17661

HP Pavilion x2

A Windows 10-ready laptop and tablet in one

On the face of it, £250 is a reasonable price for a Windows 10 laptop that converts into a tablet. Even better, the newly redesigned Pavilion x2 looks like it cost a lot more. The sharply curved metallic edges, Bang & Olufsen speakers and bright screen all smack of a premium product.

The illusion isn't quite preserved once you get your hands on it. If it feels light, that's hardly a criticism. But the slightly flexible plastic case and low-resolution screen reveal where corners have been cut. Even the speaker grille is something of a fraud: only part of it actually houses speakers, which are loud and clear, but not especially rich.

> "It's neat and usable – but only designed for light work"

Still, it's functional, and there are benefits in being able to detach the keyboard. It comes off completely, as well as folding back like a Lenovo Yoga 2. The screen section weighs 580g (less than iPads pre-iPad Air) and includes a USB 2.0 port as well as a USB 3.1 port for charging. USB 3.1 is the new design that works whichever way you plug the socket in. That's all the USB ports you get, so you can't plug in a mouse and a USB stick at the same time.

There's also a microSD card slot, not only for importing pictures but also to supplement the built-in 32GB of flash storage. Considering that most PCs come with at least a 500GB hard drive, 32GB isn't much room for Windows and all your files, but more and more laptops rely on you keeping stuff 'in the cloud' – accessed over the internet from services like Dropbox and Microsoft's OneDrive.

At the moment, the x2 comes with Windows 8.1, so to get Windows 10 you have to download the free 2.7GB upgrade and wait an hour or so for it to install. It's well worth it: the combination of desktop and tablet features is ideal for a system like this. While the 1280x800-pixel touchscreen is coarse by today's standards, the resolution isn't terrible for a 10.1in display. If you put two windows side-by-side, you won't be able to see much in either, but that was never going to be a selling point of a machine this size. At least Windows 10's window snapping makes it easy to do. The brightness levels are high enough for use outdoors.

Undersized keyboards can make accurate typing difficult, but we found this one easy to use. The touchpad is relatively responsive too, and you can tap and swipe on the screen to take advantage of Windows 10's intuitive gestures. When you're not typing, attaching the tablet part in reverse lets you use the keyboard as a stand.

The x2's Intel Atom processor is toward the lower end of the list of chips capable of running Windows 10, but in our tests it just about coped. Most of our commands got a response within half a second, fast enough to avoid frustration, and the new Edge browser ran pretty smoothly. With only 2GB of memory, you'll need to avoid opening too many apps, documents or web browser tabs at once.

It may have a full Desktop operating system, but this is a device for light use only. That makes it all the more annoying that HP installs McAfee LiveSafe security software, which hogs the processor's resources and slows everything down. Uninstall it as soon as you can, replacing it with Kaspersky instead (see our reader offer on page 68).

Battery life was good, lasting just under eight hours of moderate use, although it took ages to charge back up – more than four hours from 25 per cent to full. Overall, the Pavilion x2 is no more powerful than its price would imply, but it's neat and usable enough to recommend.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.33GHz Intel Atom Z3736F quad-core processor • 2GB memory • 32GB flash storage • 10.1in 1280x800-pixel touchscreen • Front webcam • 802.11n Wi-Fi • USB 2.0 port • Micro HDMI port • Windows 8.1 • 19.8x264x173mm (HxWxD) • 1.18kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/17661

VERDICT: Stick to one task at a time, and the Pavilion x2 gives you good performance in a practical and affordable form

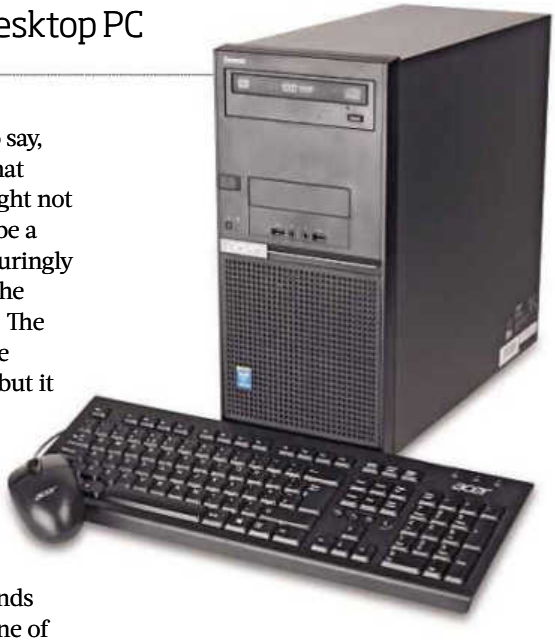
★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Toshiba Satellite Click Mini £199 This smaller and cheaper 8.9in hybrid has a sharper screen, but the keyboard isn't as good

PC | **£431** from www.snipca.com/17587

Acer Extensa EM2610 003

A middle-of-the-road desktop PC



Nobody ever got fired, they used to say, for buying IBM. A machine from that stalwart of business computing might not be the most exciting, but it would be a safe choice. Dull but worthy. Reassuringly uninspired. You might well think the same of this desktop PC from Acer. The Taiwanese company may not be the world's most innovative company, but it is the world's fourth bestselling personal computer manufacturer.

At first glance, the Extensa is the epitome of prudence. Its plain black case is so featureless, it verges on the ugly. For a tower PC, it's quite compact, though it still finds space for a built-in DVD writer – one of the advantages of sticking with a traditional PC format. The price tag is tempting, given there's a mouse and keyboard thrown in, and there are ports for two 1920x1080-pixel monitors, although one of them is of the old VGA type, which won't give you the sharpest picture with modern monitors. The configuration we tested has a mid-range Intel Core i5 processor, not a slow Pentium or Celeron.

> "Despite a capable processor, this PC is uninspiring"

What it doesn't have is USB 3.0. The six ports are all USB 2.0. That will slow the performance of an external hard drive, so if you need more storage than the included half-terabyte drive, you should open up the case and install it in the spare bay. There's a fast Ethernet network socket, but no Wi-Fi, though you could add this via USB 2.0 or in one of the two PCI-Express x16 (2nd gen) slots inside.

Adding a graphics card is another potential upgrade you could make, as long as you pick one that's bus-powered, because no separate connector is provided from the Extensa's mains power supply. The included Intel HD Graphics 4600 chip, which shares the PC's measly 4GB of memory, can't really cope with 3D games, although it's fine for simpler tasks like watching Full HD video.

Rendering video imported from a camera (a true test of processing power) works fairly quickly thanks to the i5 chip. But the Extensa began to let itself down in our multitasking tests, and we found it could become stuttery during quite basic operations. The limited memory and cheap hard drive are probably to blame.

It might seem strange that this PC comes with Windows 7, but some people *did* get fired for buying Windows 8. A Windows 8.1 licence is included, and you can upgrade to Windows 10 free of charge. Because this PC is aimed at business users, the Pro version of Windows is installed, so you'll get the Pro version of Windows 10, which adds features like drive encryption and remote desktop access.

That's a bonus – but still not enough to make us recommend the Extensa. Despite a capable processor and a reasonable price, it feels much like a PC that's been designed to be bought by IT managers who won't have to use it themselves.

SPECIFICATIONS

3.2GHz Intel quad-core i5 4460 • 4GB memory • 500GB hard drive • Intel HD 4600 graphics • 6x USB 2.0 ports • Gigabit Ethernet port • DVI port • VGA port • Windows 7/8.1 Pro • 365x175x372mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/17589

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PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT: It may look terribly sensible, but the Extensa suffers from its limited ambitions

★★☆☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: MSI Cubi £300 Pick the i5 model and add your own copy of Windows and some memory, and this mini PC works out at a similar price with Wi-Fi and USB 3.0, though no DVD

PC | **£700** from www.snipca.com/17653

CCL Nebula 200i

A complete Windows 10 PC at a reasonable price

Gamers are a funny lot. When they're not lurking in dark rooms full of empty pizza boxes or out committing heinous game-inspired crimes, they're provoking PC manufacturers to build ever-wackier desktop PC cases with shark-fin grilles, water-cooling pipes, LED lights and curvy orange bits. Frankly, they're a bad influence and a menace to society.

> "Not just for gamers, this is a complete PC for everyone"

That may or may not be entirely true, but on this occasion the rest of us might have to grudgingly admit that gamers have done us all a favour. CCL had gamers in mind when building this system, officially listed as a 'Complete Gaming PC'. In reality, however, it's a complete PC full stop, at the far from exorbitant price of £700, including keyboard, mouse and monitor. If that wasn't enough, it has a good graphics card and comes in a sleek cuboid case.

While it's mercifully free of any expensive PC-cooling equipment, the Nebula does have a more discreet way of assisting air circulation: it sits raised off the ground on a small plinth. That means its fans can work from below as well as behind, even if you place it on a carpeted floor. If you prefer it on your desk, it runs quietly enough so as not to disturb you. The exterior feels well made, with contrasting matt and glossy black surfaces, and the panels pop off without the need for tools. Yes, there are a couple of orange bits, at the bottom left and top right, and yes, they light up.

SPECIFICATIONS

3.2GHz Intel quad-core i5 4460 • 8GB memory • 1TB hybrid drive • Nvidia GeForce GTX 960 • 6x USB 3.0 ports • 2x USB 2.0 ports • Gigabit Ethernet port • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • 2x DVI ports • HDMI port • DisplayPort • Windows 10 Home • 330x260x260mm (HxWxD) • Three-year warranty

www.snipca.com/17653

On the right-hand side are two USB 3.0 ports, along with headphone and microphone jacks, while round the back are another four USB 3.0 and two USB 2.0 ports for the Microsoft keyboard and mouse. There are also two DVI ports, and an HDMI port and DisplayPort, in case the supplied Asus VE247T monitor isn't quite enough. The screen isn't the most exciting, with a middling contrast ratio, but decent colour reproduction. Once you've tried the built-in speakers, you'll be pleased to note the optical digital audio jack and connections for anything up to 7.1 surround systems.

Inside, the Nebula's motherboard is in the mini-ITX format and sits horizontally, leaving limited room. There's only one full-size PCI-Express x16 slot, and it's occupied by the Nvidia GeForce GTX 960 graphics card. You may want to swap this in future, but bear in mind any replacement must be 200mm or less.

We were delighted to see a fast 802.11ac Wi-Fi card taking up the remaining half-size PCI Express slot. Many desktop PCs leave out wireless networking unless you pay extra, but here you get the latest and fastest available. With no more slots, though, this isn't a PC you'd buy for its upgrade potential. Nor is there a DVD drive, or anywhere to install one. But doubling the installed 8GB of RAM would be easy, because it comes as one module, leaving a spare slot for one more. The 1TB hybrid drive, combining a hard drive with some flash memory, should be enough for most purposes.

The quad-core 3.2GHz Intel Core i5 processor is from Intel's Haswell range, which is now two generations behind the times, but it's still a solid mid-range performer. In our tests, it coped well with challenges like 4K video. If it struggled anywhere, it was with multitasking, where spending £40 on an extra 8GB of RAM could help. The GTX 960 had no problem with demanding 3D games, managing playable frame rates even with high-quality settings at 1920x1080-pixel resolution.

It's all very impressive, but don't tell the gamers. Let's keep this chunky, capable little system for ourselves.

VERDICT: As long as potential for expansion isn't your priority, the Nebula is a great desktop PC, even if you don't play games

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Palicomp Intel i5 Elite £600 With a less advanced graphics card, this more conventional PC has a faster processor and a built-in DVD writer

pcspecialist

PC Specialist recommends Windows

Windows 10

Unleash the gamer within you

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TABLET | **£120** from www.snipca.com/17599

Acer Iconia One 8

A low-cost Android tablet with a super-sensitive screen

Touchscreens have been around for decades, but they got popular when they actually started responding to touch, as opposed to prodding. It's one of the ways technology has overtaken science fiction. In films, people in plastic clothes make exaggerated swiping gestures to drag holograms around the room. In real life, you barely have to move your fingertip.

Even this level of sensitivity just wasn't futuristic enough for the Iconia One 8. Its new touchscreen has a finer grid of sensors embedded that detects even more subtle contact. Rather than a finger, or a rubber-tipped iPad stylus, you can actually draw on it with a pencil. Initially, it feels wrong to attack the pristine glass with a sharp object, but it really does work.

Whenever we've tried drawing or writing on a touchscreen device, even with an expensive electrical stylus such as the Adonit Jot Touch (£66 from www.snipca.com/17601), we've found it clumsy compared to pen and paper. But on Acer's Precision Plus[3] display, it feels natural and accurate – as if you're really drawing, not just pointing. The included EZ Note sketching app, however, doesn't do this full justice, so it's worth trying other apps, such as Autodesk Sketchbook (free from the Google Play Store).

Of course, your finger also works fine. The catch is that the Iconia One 8's resolution (1280x800 pixels) isn't particularly high, so you can't see really fine detail. Nor does it have palm rejection, meaning you have to hold the pencil (or whatever you use) without resting your palm on the screen, which tends to cramp your style. Even so, if you habitually express your thoughts in scribbles and doodles, this is still a step forward.

> "Its screen sensors detect even more subtle contact"

In other respects, the Iconia One 8 is pretty much your bog-standard low-cost tablet. Colour reproduction is in the same territory as Tesco's Hudl 2, meaning not great, and maximum brightness is only just enough to cope with outdoor usage. The Intel Atom processor and 1GB of memory are also little to write home about, but we found the Android operating system (5.0, Lollipop) very responsive, and web pages loaded faster than on more expensive tablets such as the Lenovo Yoga Tablet 2 Pro.

Demanding 3D games require more processing power than this for smooth running, but 2D games should work fine.

The battery lasted eight hours 19 minutes playing videos – an hour longer than the Hudl, although most other tablets can beat that. Only 10GB of the 16GB built-in storage is available for use (Android takes up the rest), which will very quickly fill up with photos, videos, apps and downloaded content, so you'll want to budget for a microSD card too; 32GB should cost under a tenner.

Talking of photos, the 5-megapixel camera on the back isn't as good as the one on Acer's smaller Iconia One 7, and you won't get Acer's customisable camera app on this model, which is disappointing. Our outdoor shots weren't accurately exposed or balanced, and lacked detail, while indoor shots produced grainy pictures. Most people wouldn't generally choose to take photos with a tablet, so this probably doesn't matter too much.

With a choice of five colours (including black and white), the Iconia One 8's simple design should suit all tastes. It's a shame the screen isn't as sharp or colourful as it is sensitive, but for £120 it's a very good buy.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.33GHz Intel Atom Z3735G quad-core processor • 1GB memory • 16GB flash storage • 8in 1280x800-pixel touchscreen • 5-megapixel rear camera • 0.3-megapixel webcam • MicroSD card slot • 802.11n Wi-Fi • Android 5.0 (Lollipop) • 214x128x9.5mm (HxWxD) • 355g • One-year warranty

www.snipca.com/17600

VERDICT: Acer's well-made and capable budget tablet has a beauty that's more than skin deep

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Tesco Hudl 2 £99 Even cheaper and with a slightly bigger display, the Hudl 2 is a great choice if a precision screen isn't required

PC MONITOR | **£136** from www.snipca.com/17603

Iiyama ProLite XU2390HS-B1

A very affordable 23in monitor

Computer active GREAT PICK ★★★★☆

The standard monitor size these days is 24 inches, that being the diagonal measurement from the pixel at the bottom left to the one at the top right. If we quoted the dimensions the same way as any other object, we'd call it 531x299mm. You can get bigger, of course, but when you think that in 1984 the Apple Macintosh started the personal computer revolution with a screen that was only nine inches across, two feet should be enough for anyone.

The ProLite XU2390HS-B1 is a standard shape (16:9 widescreen), but at 23 inches, slightly smaller than your average. It feels even more compact, thanks to the relatively narrow bezel around the screen edges – these are still clearly visible, but attractively discreet. The base is pretty innocuous with no expanses of glossy black plastic to pick up fingerprints. Even the back panel isn't as ugly as some.

> "A compact, high-quality and affordable PC monitor"

This all means the ProLite could be a good choice if you don't have much room to play with. You're unlikely to miss the extra inch, while the Full HD (1920x1080-pixel) resolution looks a tiny bit sharper at the reduced size. More important is the quality of the display, which is really rather good. Our tests showed that an impressive 93 per cent of the standard sRGB colour range was covered, and this improved a fraction when we tweaked the settings. These are operated by unlabelled buttons, which makes things a little confusing at first.

There are certainly more accurate and vibrant panels around, but you won't see much better at this price. Blacks were nice and deep, with very little leakage from the backlight. This, along with the high contrast levels, meant our photos looked great. Moving images also ran smoothly enough, except when we undertook some serious gaming. The glass has an anti-glare finish, so reflections won't distract you when you're working.

DVI, HDMI and VGA ports are included to cover all input bases, although there's no USB hub, which often come with pricier monitors and let you connect peripherals to your PC via the screen. There's also no headphone socket on the monitor, but small stereo speakers are built in. With tilt adjustment but no swivel, rotation or height controls, the ProLite XU2390HS-B1 is undeniably a basic monitor, but as an affordable way to complete a desktop system or complement a laptop, it won't disappoint.

SPECIFICATIONS

23in IPS LCD • 1920x1080-pixel resolution • 1x HDMI port • 1x DVI port • 1x VGA port • Stereo speakers • 388x532x180mm (HxWxD) • Two-year warranty

www.snipca.com/17604

VERDICT: Just enough monitor for not too much money

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Dell UltraSharp U2414H £190 Hardly a fair comparison, but it's worth knowing you can buy an elegant, excellent 24in monitor for only a tad more money

The best... iPad styluses

Wacom Intuos Creative Stylus 2

£61 from www.snipca.com/17662

Wacom's original Creative Stylus had a large, soft tip, yet felt precise. It's still a great budget option (£20 from www.snipca.com/17667). The new version has a harder, finer tip, and works perfectly with Adobe's apps as well as Wacom's Bamboo Paper and Zen Brush. We found it a little erratic with other apps, but it's a high-quality stylus with a neat case.

Ten One Design Pogo Connect 2

£35 from www.snipca.com/17669

Pogo pioneered pressure sensitivity for tablets. This new version works with the latest iPad models and claims improved response, requiring 'zero grams of activation force'. We can't agree: it actually takes a bit of welly to make it work. But that's a good thing, because drawing is more controllable. A range of different-shaped tips is available too.

Pencil by FiftyThree

£29 from www.snipca.com/17671

Also available in a wood finish, this stylus looks like a carpenter's pencil and is designed for use with FiftyThree's excellent Paper app. It doesn't detect pressure; instead, the app varies line thickness or other properties according to how fast you draw, which works amazingly well. It's a lovely tool and reasonably priced.

Adonit Jot Touch with Pixelpoint

£64 from www.snipca.com/17672

Technically similar to Adobe's overpriced Ink stylus, this has a fine tip and feels precise, though it can't match the accuracy of a dedicated graphics tablet. Check compatibility with your favourite apps (see www.snipca.com/17673) because Adonit's various styluses differ. This Pixelpoint model is comparable to the Wacom Creative Stylus 2.

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The V1 is a very capable entry-level system perfect from basic home/office tasks. It's based around the dual-core Intel® Pentium® G3240 processor, 4GB of RAM plus a 500GB hard disk.

Scan V15 Value System Home / Office PC

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- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Windows 10

£475 Inc VAT

The V15 ups the ante by including a quad-core Intel® Core™ i5 4460 processor, so it makes light work of office and multimedia applications.

Scan G20 Value System Gaming PC

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- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 750 Ti SSC
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- 3 Year Premium Warranty

£999 Inc VAT

The 3XS Gamer 20i is a super-fast gaming PC thanks to its combination of quad-core Intel Core i7 4790 CPU running at 3.6GHz with added Hyper-Threading plus a 4GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970 graphics card. These components are installed in an Asus Z97-P motherboard along with a 1TB hard disk.

Scan 3XS Z170 Vengeance Gaming PC

- Intel® Core™ i7 6700K processor overclocked up to 4.6GHz
- 8GB Corsair DDR4 3000MHz memory
- 4GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980 SC
- 256GB Samsung PCIe SSD & 2TB HDD
- Windows 10
- 3 Year Premium Warranty

£1499 Inc VAT

This high-end gaming system includes a water-cooled Intel Core i7 6700K CPU overclocked up to 4.6GHz plus a 4GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 980 graphics card, 8GB of 3000MHz Corsair Vengeance LPX DDR4 plus a 256GB PCI-E SSD for lighting quick gaming loading and a 2TB hard disk.

3XS Graphite LG157 Gaming Laptop

- Intel® Core™ i7 4720HQ processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 2GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 960M
- 15.6in 1,920 x 1,080 screen
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Windows 10

£869 Inc VAT

The LG157 is a 15.6" mid-range gaming laptop that includes a NVIDIA GeForce GTX 960M graphics card plus an Intel Core i7 4720HQ CPU, up to 16GB of RAM and multiple hard disks and SSDs. The LG157 is ready for next-day delivery and is protected by a 2 Year Premium Warranty.

3XS Graphite LG1720 Gaming Laptop

- Intel® Core™ i7 4720HQ processor
- 8GB Corsair DDR3 1600MHz memory
- 3GB NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970M
- 17.3in 1,920 x 1,080 screen
- 1TB SATA 6Gb/sec hard drive
- Windows 10

£1075 Inc VAT

The LG1720 is a 17.3" high-end gaming laptop that includes a choice of powerful NVIDIA GeForce GTX 970M or 980M graphics card, ensuring silky smooth frame rates in all games. The LG1720 is ready for next-day delivery and has a 2 Year Warranty.

Scan Computers recommends Windows.

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PHONE | **£145** from www.snipca.com/17605

Huawei Honor 4X

A big smartphone at a small price

Huawei and Hyundai are not alike. One is a car maker from South Korea, the other a Chinese telecoms giant. What they have in common is that no matter how much they try to help us, English speakers can't seem to say their names right.

Hyundai used to run TV adverts encouraging us to say 'HYUN-day, just like Sunday'. But we kept on saying 'high-UN-die'. Huawei will tell you that its name is pronounced 'WAH-way', but most of us would rather avoid attempting it at all. And that's probably why the company name is nowhere to be found on this phone. Instead it bears Huawei's Anglo-friendly (though US-spelled), 'Honor' logo.

If this large-style 'phablet' phone is anything to go by, it's a name to watch. For under £150, this is an attractive device featuring its own textured shell, which means you won't need to buy a case. The iPhone 6 Plus-sized 5.5in screen has 277 pixels per inch, which makes for a sharp display, even if it's not quite Retina quality.

High contrast levels and brightness make up for the average colour accuracy, but the biggest compromise is that the Honor 4X has a plastic screen protector applied rather than coming with toughened glass. As a result, it picks up more fingerprints than the usual treated finishes.

The 13-megapixel camera on the back takes good-quality pictures and Full HD videos. The overly bright auto-exposure was rescued by switching to HDR (high dynamic range) mode, and we found plenty of detail in our pictures. A nice trick is the All Focus mode, which lets you shift focus after taking the shot, like a primitive version of a Lytro camera (www.snipca.com/17607). This comes in useful if you want to produce a sharp subject against a soft-focus background.

A 1.2GHz processor and 2GB of memory make everything work quickly and smoothly, beating the likes of the Moto G. Huawei's Emotion user interface (based on Android 4.4) is basic, but the 4X is easy to use, and demanding 3D games work reasonably well. The 8GB storage is mostly taken up by the bundled software and operating system, so budget for an extra £10 for a 32GB microSD card.

This is a plastic phone that nobody is going to mistake for something costing three times as much – but in every way, it's really almost as good.

SPECIFICATIONS

5.5in 1280x720-pixel screen • 13-megapixel rear camera • 5-megapixel front camera • 8GB flash storage • MicroSD card slot • 802.11n Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.0 • 3G/4G • 146x73x7.3mm (HxWxD) • 136g • One-year warranty

www.snipca.com/17606

VERDICT: If top build quality isn't your priority, this is a fantastic deal on a very capable phone

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Vodafone Smart Ultra 6 £125 If you don't mind being on Vodafone, this model has a higher-resolution screen and twice the storage

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

What should I use for work on the go?

Q I have a desktop PC, but a couple of times a year I work away from home and need to write Word documents and access emails. My iPad mini is not large enough to do this easily and, as a touch typist, I hate the on-screen keyboard.

A few years ago I bought a Samsung netbook, but it's now slowed down to a crawl. Would an Android tablet with a separate Bluetooth keyboard be easier, lighter and cheaper than a laptop?

Sheelagh Wurr

A A low-end laptop could work out cheaper. The HP Stream 11 (£179 from www.snipca.com/17578) has a larger screen than a full-size iPad and a decent keyboard. Its specs are adequate for using Word and email, and it comes with a year's Office 365 subscription as well as Windows 8.1, upgradable free to Windows 10. The Asus EeeBook X205TA (£160 from www.snipca.com/17579) is similar.

You could also consider a Chromebook, which runs everything within a web browser, including text editors. The Dell Chromebook 11 (2015 model) (£237 from www.snipca.com/17581 – pictured) is a very sturdy option.

If you go for a tablet, consider a full-size Bluetooth keyboard rather than the cramped tablet models. Today's flat desktop keyboards may not be very tactile, but fit easily in a laptop bag.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

SECURITY USB STICK | **£45** from www.snipca.com/17649

FixMeStick

A USB drive that promises to remove malware

Malware can attack your PC over the internet, denying you access to your files and even making your computer unusable. Protection is built into Windows 8 and 10 (Windows Defender), but this won't catch everything.

While there are plenty of security options, including free antivirus programs from Avast, AVG, Bitdefender, Panda and more, the FixMeStick is different. Plug it in and run a scan before Windows boots, and you stand a better chance of finding even the sneakiest malware – the kind of stuff that can mess with your installed antivirus. If your PC is protected by Windows' BitLocker file encryption or any other encryption software, however, FixMeStick won't work unless you disable it.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

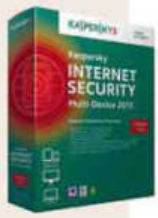
Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8 or 10 • Also available for Mac • Works on up to three PCs www.snipca.com/17648

As well as its own operating system, the FixMeStick comes with malware databases from Vipre, Kaspersky and Sophos (the latter two were the top performers in recent Dennis Technology Labs antivirus tests). It is is easy to use, and if you choose to 'quarantine' suspect files, you can still retrieve them later. You can use the stick on up to three PCs per month, so you can also help out friends and relatives. Bear in mind it expires after a year, so by the time you need it you might have to pay again.

Most paid-for security packages let you create your own 'fix-me' drive on a DVD or USB stick. The only advantage of the FixMeStick is that it has three malware databases instead of one. We're not convinced that Mac users need antivirus software, but every Windows user should run it constantly – and FixMeStick doesn't provide that level of security.

VERDICT: Could be handy as a last-ditch repair tool, but ordinary antivirus software offers the same thing as well as ongoing prevention

★★★☆☆



ALTERNATIVE: Kaspersky Internet Security 2015 £20
Simply the best antivirus money can buy, having won our past six tests

HOME SECURITY CAMERA | **£159** from www.snipca.com/17650

Google Nest Cam HD

See and hear what's happening while you're away

Last year, Google bought Nest (the smart-thermostat company) and Dropcam (the internet security camera company), and this camera combines the know-how of both manufacturers. It is designed for indoor use and connected to a mains adapter via the supplied three-metre microUSB (you could also use a USB battery pack for limited periods).

It records continuously at 1080p Full HD resolution, and you can monitor the video stream via Wi-Fi on your phone or tablet (iOS or Android), PC or Mac. The camera has a microphone and speaker, so you can hear what's going on and even talk back – so you can tell your cat to get off the sofa (good luck with that!). If you're not at home, the stream comes over the internet.

What you can't do is store recordings. If you want to rewind video and save clips, you have to pay £8 a month or £80 a year (plus £4 per extra camera) for a service called Nest Aware. This keeps 10 days of video 'in the cloud' (on Google's servers) and adds features like time-lapse and motion detection, which will alert you once every half-hour if it detects an unusual sound or movement. There is a three-month free trial available.

Saving clips continuously to Nest Aware or streaming to outside your home will use up to 1.2Mbps of data, which could add up to 60GB a month, so you'll need fast, unlimited broadband. The Nest Cam works well, but we're not sure the subscription aspect will catch on.

SPECIFICATIONS

1080p • Microphone • Speaker • Motion detection • 114x73x73mm (HxWxD) • Requires broadband internet connection • Nest Aware subscription needed for some features www.snipca.com/17652

VERDICT: The camera is great, but consider alternatives if you don't want to commit to an ongoing expense

★★★☆☆

ALTERNATIVE: Netgear Arlo £280
Two wireless weatherproof cameras that come with free video storage, but limited battery life and no audio

OFFICE SOFTWARE | **£5.99** from www.snipca.com/17663

Microsoft Office 2016 for Mac

A major upgrade for OS X users

Computer active GREAT PICK ★★★★☆

Apple keeps selling more and more MacBooks, while other PC makers struggle. Everyone loves the sleek, minimalist hardware. But what about the software? Although every Mac comes with beautifully designed free apps, not every Windows program is available for Apple's OS X operating system. Microsoft Office is, but the Mac version hasn't been updated for five years. Until now.

Office 2016 was released to Office 365 subscribers in July and is available as a 'one-time purchase' from September. Like previous Mac versions, it includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook; the Access database available for Windows is absent, which won't bother most users. You also get OneNote, Microsoft's note-taking program.

> "Office 2016 feels more modern and responsive"

The biggest improvement is to the look of the apps, which is crisp, flat and less cluttered. The 'ribbon' of tools is still there at the top, but it's much friendlier. If you choose the 'Colorful' option during setup (or in Preferences), each app's ribbon is a different colour – blue for Word, green for Excel, and so on.

It's a big change, but not so much that you'll get lost, whether you're coming from Office 2011 for Mac, the Windows version or Office 365's online apps. The main omission compared with Windows is Backstage, the giant File menu with file-management options. A File menu that just drops down like every other menu is fine with us, thanks.

Former Windows users will also appreciate the inclusion of Ctrl-key shortcuts as well as the Mac Command-key equivalents. But Mac users, especially of Excel, might have serious problems with the absence of some previous combinations and the complete removal of user-defined shortcuts. Trackpad multi-touch gestures, such as pinch to zoom, don't make up for that, but they're a welcome addition.

OS X's full-screen mode is supported, and works well on smaller MacBooks. It's missing from Outlook, Microsoft's email app, as is the My Day view, while Calendar, Contacts, Tasks and Notes are only accessible when you choose Folder Pane from the View menu, which is confusing at first. Many users will stick with Apple's Mail, but Outlook is a good alternative and will suit business users with Microsoft mail servers.

Word 2016 has a new Design tab and loses its Tables, Charts and Smart Art tabs, although all of those features still exist. It also gains Smart Look Up: select a term in a document, click on this command in the Review tab, and you'll get related information from the web. The Resume Reading feature auto-bookmarks your reading position in a document and takes you back there when you re-open it. Along with PowerPoint, Word now has threaded comments, so when collaborating with other users you can reply to their comments within documents.

Excel also gets Smart Look Up, and an equation editor. It can recommend which type of chart is best suited to a data set, and an add-on called Analysis ToolPak enables more complex statistical and engineering analysis. PowerPoint lets you choose from variants of a theme – so you can keep the style but change the colours, say – and supports more slide transitions. If you choose to store documents 'in the cloud' with OneDrive, as Microsoft seems keen for us all to do, you can access them from Windows, the Office apps for iPhone and iPad, or in any web browser.

Office 2016 feels more modern and responsive, and manages to be consistent with other versions of Office while feeling like a proper Mac app. Where Office 2011 was unwieldy, it's now lighter and easier. A vast improvement.

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

OS X 10.10 (Mavericks) or later • 4GB memory • 1280x800 or larger display • 6GB of available hard-drive space • Office 365 subscription • Skype account for Skype features www.snipca.com/17664

VERDICT: A cleaner, brighter Office is good news for the Mac, but Microsoft apps aren't essential for everyone

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: iWork Free

Apple's own office apps lack some advanced features, but are easy to use on Mac, on iOS and in web browsers

GPS TRACKER | **£114** from www.snipca.com/17611

Spot Gen3

Alert friends and family if you need help outside

Any smartphone can send your location to friends and family, but what if you've had an accident and can't fiddle about with an app – or you're out hiking beyond any mobile signal? This gadget side-steps both of these problems, with simple controls and an outgoing satellite connection.

It's easy to set up. Using the device itself and the manufacturer's website, enter the serial number on the back of the battery compartment, give the device a name, add details for your emergency contacts, write any custom messages you might need to send them, and you're ready to go.

> "It makes it so easy to tell your loved ones where you are"

When you're out and about, the Gen3 constantly tracks your position and lets you send it to a contact by pressing one of three buttons. Two of them send one of the prewritten messages you created, and the other posts your location to a map in Google Maps, whether for your own reference or to reassure whoever is keeping an eye on your wellbeing.

If disaster strikes, you simply flip the covers off two other buttons: one requests assistance from your friends and family, the other alerts the emergency services. Depending on your location, that could mean the police, coastguard, or – if you're overseas – even an embassy.

Rather than the mobile phone network, the Gen3 communicates directly with a satellite to give you 96 per cent global coverage (there's a map at www.snipca.com/17609). Bear in mind that it won't work indoors or anywhere where the sky is blocked, and performance could be impaired by heavy cloud. Once you press any of the communication buttons, it'll keep trying to send your message until it gets through.

The device itself is made from rugged plastic that shouldn't crack if dropped, and the battery bay cover screws into place to form a tight seal that's impervious to fog and will withstand a metre of water for 30 minutes. Behind it, there's space for four AAA batteries and, to the side, a USB port for external power. While driving, you could charge it from the cigarette lighter and leave it in the windscreen so it can link to the satellite.

On top of the cost of the hardware you'll need to pay £96 a year for basic communications coverage. This logs your position with the system every 10 minutes. Two paid-for brands above this offer more frequent updates if you feel the need. It's not cheap, but comparable to travel insurance and of more direct assistance.

SPECIFICATIONS
GPS • Satellite uplink • Requires 4x AAA batteries or USB power • Waterproof to 1 metre for 30 minutes • 87x65x25.4mm (HxWxD) • 114g
www.snipca.com/17612

VERDICT: For those who like to get out and about and value their safety, this could be a reassuring investment

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE: Find My Friends Free iPhones already have a service that uses GPS to inform contacts of their location, but it requires a mobile signal or Wi-Fi coverage

COMING SOON

SEPTEMBER 2015

Apple's next iPhone is likely to be out mid-September. It's unlikely to change shape or size, but it may get a new colour option, maybe pink or an Apple Watch-like 'rose gold'. An improved processor and camera are expected, as well as the Force Touch feature from the Apple Watch.

AUTUMN 2015

The mobile version of Microsoft's Windows 10 wasn't ready in July when the Desktop operating system arrived. When it launches, we can expect new phones as well. Existing Lumia 535, 640 and 930 users will be able to upgrade from Windows Phone 8.1.

AUTUMN 2015

Acer is releasing a range of 'Cloudbooks' running Windows 10. These light, cheap laptops are designed mostly to be used for web browsing, rivalling Google's Chromebooks. Turn to page 49 for more information.

2016

The launch of Google's Project Ara has been delayed to 2016. It's a phone that comes as a sort of skeleton into which you slot whatever parts you want, making it easy to customise.

NEXT ISSUE

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Asus X555LA-XX290H

£300 from www.snipca.com/16158
Tested: Issue 446

Asus has made all the right choices with this budget Windows 8.1 laptop. Its comfortable keyboard, fast performance, respectably lengthy battery life and bright screen are all the more impressive given its low price.

ALTERNATIVE Asus Chromebook C200 A cheap Chrome OS ultra-portable laptop with a bright screen, lengthy battery life and a great keyboard. £214 from www.snipca.com/17296

DESKTOP PC

PC Specialist Trion 960

£650 from www.snipca.com/17254
Tested: Issue 454

You could spend less on a usable PC, but this solid tower system has great all-round performance, including decent Nvidia GTX 960 graphics card. A 120GB SSD and 1TB hard drive offers speed and space, but Wi-Fi costs £15 extra.

ALTERNATIVE: Palicomp Intel i5 Elite For £50 less, this is a similar PC in many respects, but compromises on graphics with the cheaper GTX 750 card. £600 from www.snipca.com/17297

TABLET

Apple iPad Mini 2

£239 from www.snipca.com/14467
Tested: Issue 416

Apple's mini tablet from 2013 is now available at an even lower price. The only thing it lacks compared with the Mini 3 is a fingerprint sensor and the option of lots of built-in storage. Otherwise, it's an absolute bargain.

ALTERNATIVE: Apple iPad Air 2 A thin and lightweight 10in tablet with a fingerprint reader, an excellent screen and peerless selection of apps. £399 from www.snipca.com/16717

PHONE

Samsung Galaxy A3

£190 from www.snipca.com/17193
Tested: Issue 454

Similar in size to an iPhone 6, this Android phone doesn't have a high-res screen or high-end performance for advanced games and creative apps, but it lasts over 14 hours on a charge, has a great camera and is reasonably priced.

ALTERNATIVE: Sony Xperia Z1 Compact We recommended this back in IIssue 419 and it's still a great phone. £215 from www.snipca.com/11579

DIGITAL CAMERA

Panasonic Lumix DMC-GF6

£270 from www.snipca.com/17548
Tested: Issue 405

This compact, interchangeable-lens camera is small and reasonably priced, yet it has well-designed controls, a wide range of available lenses and shoots excellent quality photos. The GF6 really is unbeatable value.

ALTERNATIVE: Sony A5000 A rival CSC with better low-light performance, although its controls and range of available lenses aren't quite as good. £249 from www.snipca.com/15854

E-READER

Kobo Aura H2O

£140 from www.snipca.com/15490
Tested: Issue 435

A waterproof e-reader with an easy-to-read, high-resolution touchscreen that's easy on the eyes and great for reading in the bath. There's no 3G version, but, unlike the Amazon Kindle, you can buy ebooks from independent retailers that use the ePub format.

ALTERNATIVE: Amazon Kindle Voyage The best Kindle yet, with a sharp, extremely responsive touchscreen and easy-grip design. £170 from www.snipca.com/14451

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SECURITY SOFTWARE

Kaspersky Internet Security 2015

£17.99 from www.snipca.com/14212
Tested: Issue 437

Kaspersky Internet Security 2015 has won our past six antivirus tests – an unprecedented set of results. The 2015 edition is available at an exclusive reader discount on our Software Store. Go to the link above for a one-device licence, or buy a three-device licence for just £39.99 at www.snipca.com/14221.

ALTERNATIVE: Avast Free Antivirus Almost as good as Kaspersky, but sometimes blocked legitimate software. Free from www.snipca.com/16493

SMART TV

PRICE DROP

Samsung UE40H5500

£328 from www.snipca.com/17715
Tested: Issue 446

A 40in smart TV with great picture quality and apps for all the terrestrial TV catch-up services. It has plenty of extras too, such as recording to USB storage, playing media files stored on a NAS or USB stick and plenty of HDMI ports.

ALTERNATIVE: Sony KDL-42W705B Excellent image quality, stylish looks and a 42in screen. £420 from www.snipca.com/17550

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 2 **Kitvision Safeguard HD Home Security Cameras**

If you install Kitvision Safeguard HD Home Security Camera, you'll be able to watch high-definition footage of your home from anywhere in the world. Just grab your iOS or Android device, or log into a computer, and you'll be able to keep an eye on your home. Whenever the camera detects movement, you'll receive a notification alert. It includes night vision. To enter, email your address to cacomp@dennis.co.uk by midnight 15 September.

The Kitvision Safeguard HD Home Security Camera is available to buy now from Amazon priced £99.99: www.snipca.com/17711. For more information on Kitvision's products visit www.kitvision.co.uk and follow @KitvisionUK on Twitter

MULTIFUNCTION PRINTER

PRICE DROP

Canon Pixma MG4250

£44 from www.snipca.com/12457
Tested: Issue 382

This budget multifunction printer (MFP) isn't the fastest available, but it's cheap to buy and inexpensive to run. Just as importantly, both prints and scans look great. Unless you need faster print speeds or separate ink tanks for each colour, this MFP is the one to buy.

ALTERNATIVE: Epson Expression Photo XP-760 A MFP aimed at photographers with an excellent scanner and peerless photo print quality. £124 from www.snipca.com/16497

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Crucial BX100 1TB

£259 from www.snipca.com/16017
Tested: Issue 445

A blindingly fast, high-capacity SSD at a lower price than ever before. If you've been put off buying a SSD because of the cost, then now is finally the time to take the plunge.

ALTERNATIVE: Samsung 850 Pro 256GB An even faster SSD, but it is much more expensive per gigabyte. £110 from www.snipca.com/16498

SECURITY CAMERA

PRICE DROP

Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

£109 from www.snipca.com/11646
Tested: Issue 420

A home-security camera that's well priced and easy to set up. Plus, it has great picture quality, useful apps and there's no need to subscribe to any extra services. It's a worthy successor to the original HomeMonitor, our previous favourite security camera.

ALTERNATIVE: D-Link Wireless N Day & Night Camera A good-value security camera with excellent night vision. £88 from www.snipca.com/15275

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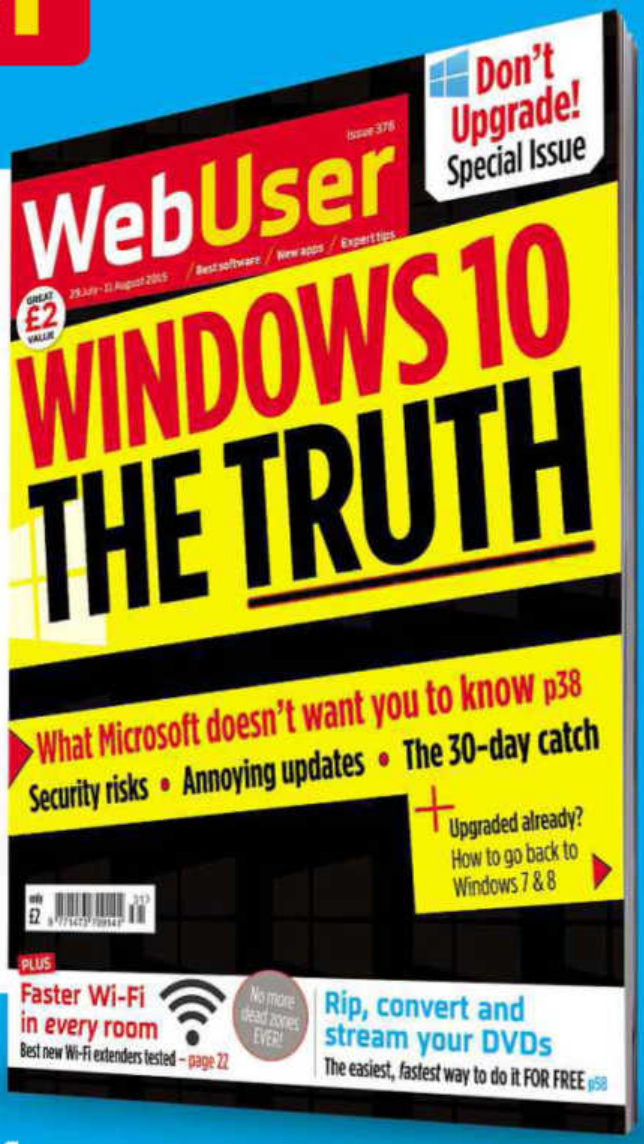
Hi everyone...

As you may know, we have a sister title called ***Web User***, which is every bit as good as ***Computeractive***. It focuses more on internet advice, giving you tips on browsers, websites, apps and online safety, and has the same plain-English ethos as we do.

I think you'll love ***Web User***, so I've persuaded them to offer ***Computeractive*** readers an exclusive, one-off subscription deal (in return, they've told me I've got to make the tea for a week!). Subscribing to both means you'll get a great read delivered through your letterbox every week. I hope you enjoy reading ***Web User*** as much as I do.

All the best...

Daniel Booth
Editor, Computeractive



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14 pages of easy-to-follow workshops and expert tips

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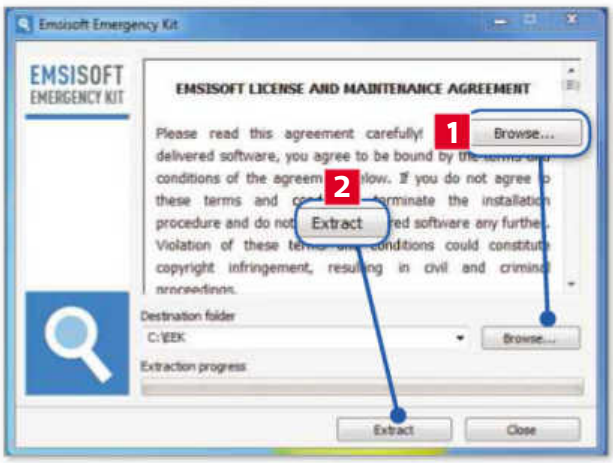
PLUS
43 Readers' Tips
44 Phone & Tablet Tips
46 Make Windows Better
47 Make Office Better
48 Secret Tips For... Control Panel

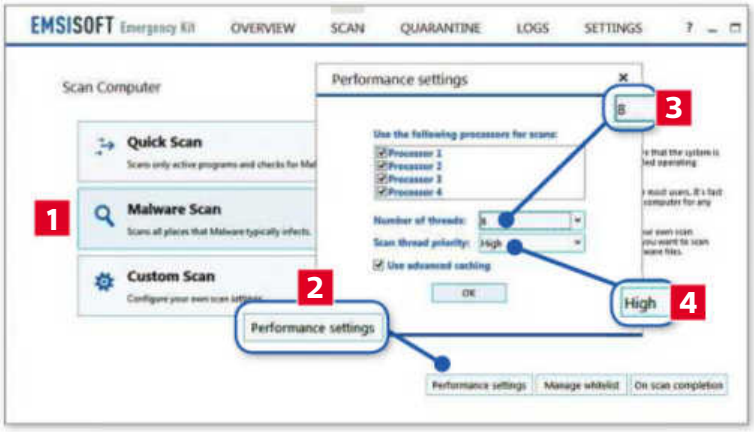
Run a second antivirus without clashing

What you need: Emsisoft Emergency Kit; USB stick; Windows XP, Vista, 7 or 8
Time required: 45 minutes

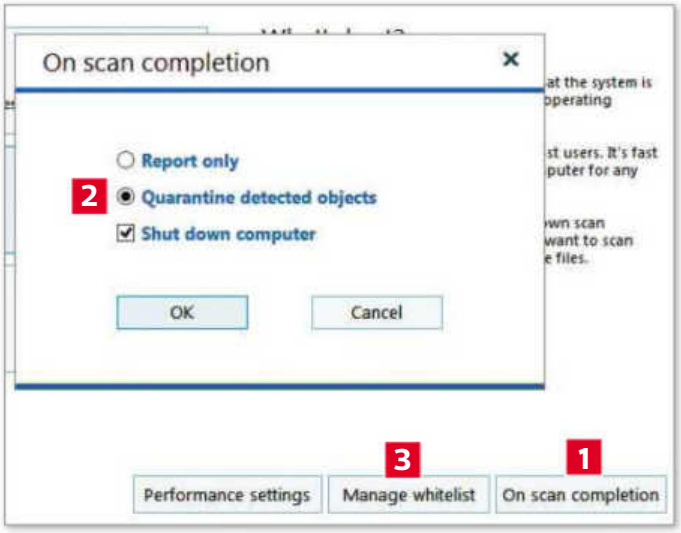
With its telltale tagline 'Every hero needs a sidekick', Emsisoft Emergency Kit is a brilliant free security program that works alongside your existing antivirus program (without clashing) to beef up your PC's security. Its powerful scan engines will find and remove viruses, trojans, spyware, PUPs, keyloggers and adware that your antivirus may overlook. We'll show you how to tweak its default settings to quarantine infected files, and you can even use it as a portable program to scan other PCs.

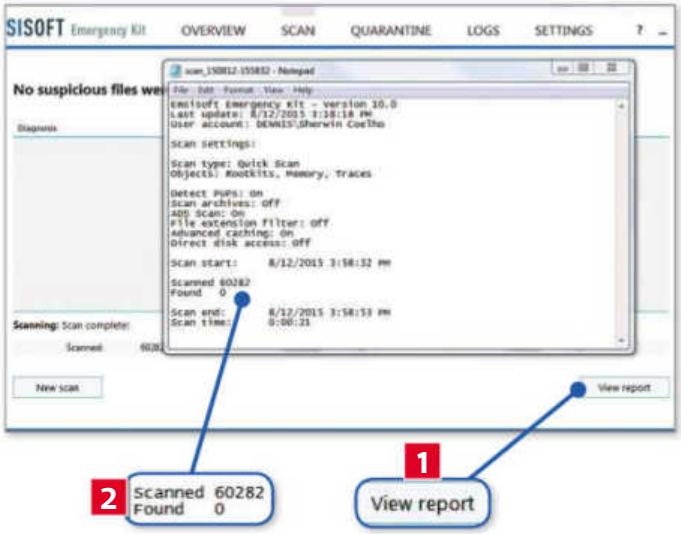
STEP 1 Go to www.snipca.com/17590, click the green Download button, then open the downloaded setup file. If you want to use Emsisoft Emergency Kit as a portable program, click Browse 1, navigate to your USB stick, click OK, then click Extract. To install it on your current PC, simply click Extract 2. You won't see the usual notification at this point asking you to uninstall your current antivirus program (we're using Kaspersky Internet Security 2015 – see page 68 for our Reader Offer). Open Start Emsisoft Emergency Kit on your Desktop (or USB stick), then click Yes to update the program's virus definitions.





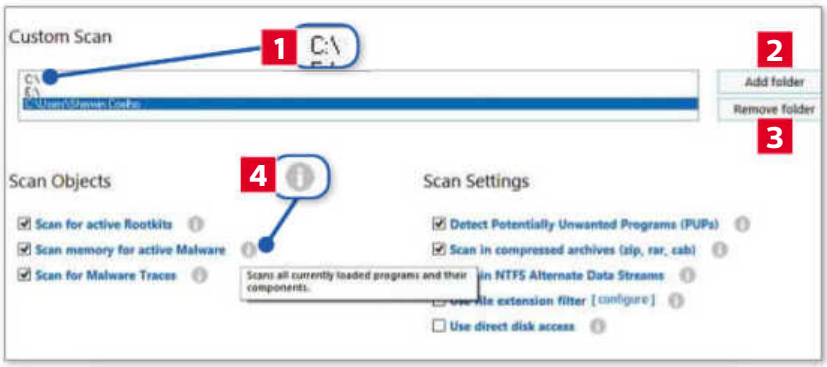
STEP 2 When that's done, the Update tile on the left will turn green. Now click the Scan tile to see options for three types of scans 1. Before running a scan, we'll tweak the program's default scan settings. Click 'Performance settings' 2, and you'll see that all your processors and the 'Use advanced caching' boxes are ticked by default. Now set the number of threads to its highest possible value 3, set the 'Scan thread priority' to High 4, then click OK. This basically dedicates all your PC's resources to carrying out a more comprehensive (albeit slower) scan.





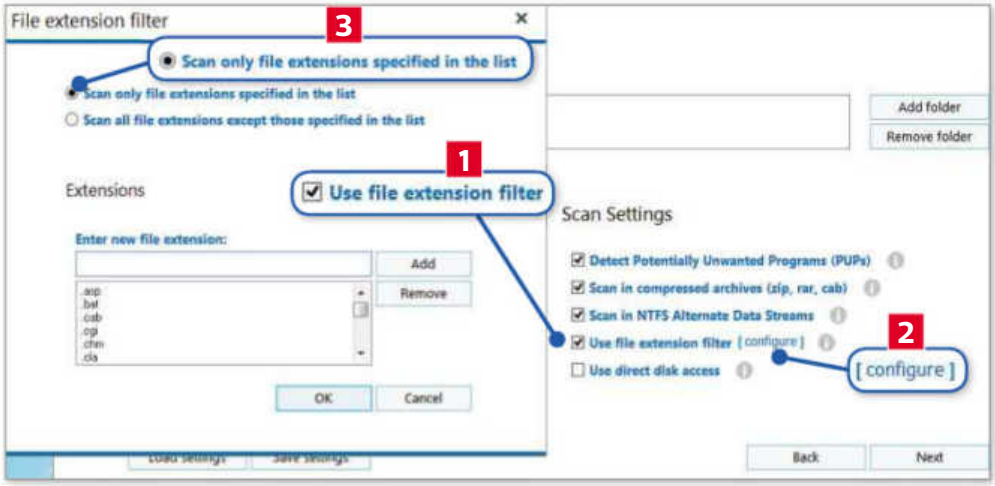
STEP 3 Now click 'On scan completion' 1 and select 'Quarantine detected objects' 2 (it's set to 'Report only' by default). If you're starting a scan before going to bed, say, tick 'Shut down computer'. Next, click OK, then 'Manage whitelist' 3. Here, you can choose to exclude certain files, folders or programs from your scan (only exclude items that you know are safe). Click the Type dropdown menu at the top left and select File, Folder or Process. Now click inside the Item field, click the three dots, navigate to the item you want to exclude, then click Open to add it to the list. Repeat this to add as many items as you want, then click OK.

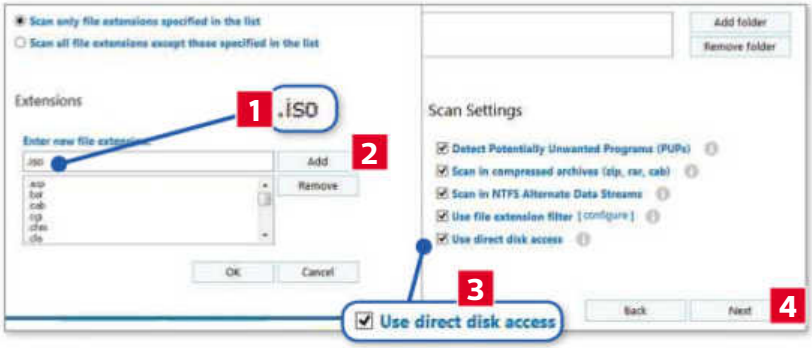
STEP 4 Now select the type of scan you want to perform. Quick Scan only covers the programs you've currently got open, while Malware Scan is more thorough (to perform a Custom Scan, skip to the next step). Click Yes after selecting the scan. Because of the settings you tweaked in Step 3, any items detected will automatically be quarantined. Click 'View report' 1 to see your scan results (as a Notepad file). This includes details about the scanned items, what time the scan started and finished, and how many items were scanned and quarantined 2.



STEP 5 Custom Scan works a little differently. Click it and you'll see your C drive is selected by default 1. To add another location (an external drive, say), click 'Add folder' 2, navigate to it, then click OK. To remove a folder you mistakenly added, simply select it in the list, then click 'Remove folder' 3. By default, all the boxes in the Scan Objects section (bottom left) and the first three boxes in the Scan Settings section (bottom right) are ticked. Move your cursor to any 'i' symbol 4 to read more information about that item.

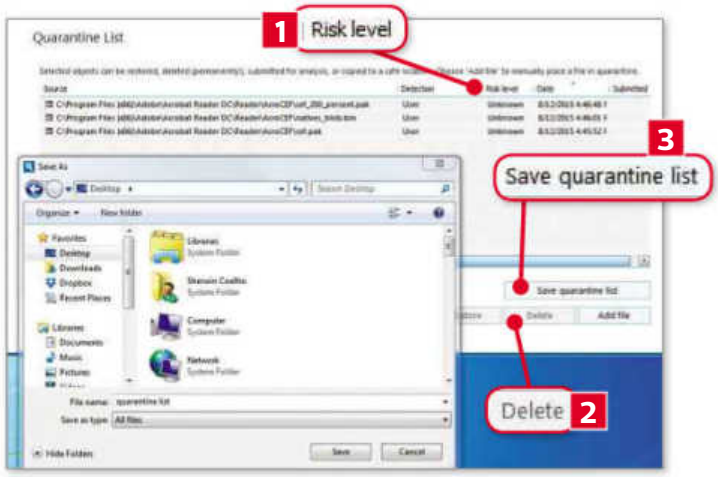
STEP 6 Next, tick 'Use file extension filter' 1, then click the 'configure' link beside it 2 and ensure 'Scan only file extensions specified in the list' is selected 3. In the list below you'll see a list of common file extensions (including .exe, .doc, .xls, .txt and so on). We noticed some useful extensions (such as .iso, .mp3 and .wav) are not included in this default list, but it's very easy to add them.

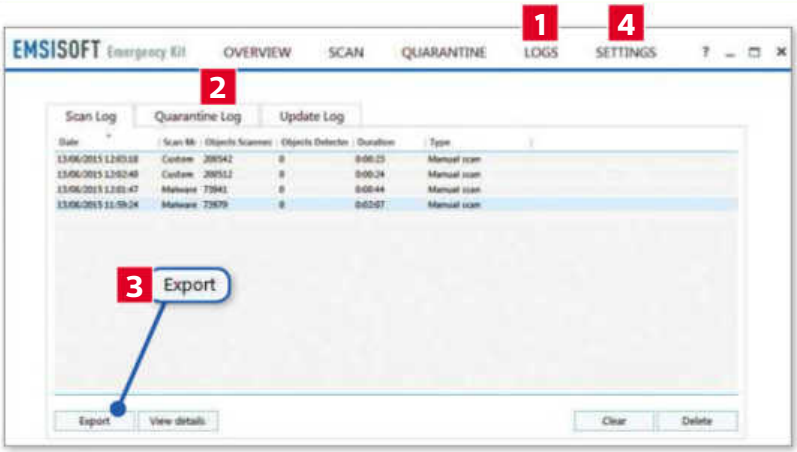




STEP 7 To add these, type an extension you'd like to add (for example, .iso) in the 'Enter new extension file extension' field 1 and click Add 2. Type other extensions to add them in the same way, then click OK when you've finished. Now tick 'Use direct disk access' 3 (this will hunt down harmful rootkits), then click Next 4 to begin scanning. You can pause or stop the scan at any time by clicking the relevant buttons. Any items detected will automatically be quarantined.

STEP 8 Click the Quarantine section at the top to see a list of quarantined items from your scans. If the 'Risk level' 1 is Medium or High, then you should delete the files. Keeping the Ctrl key pressed, click to select the files, then click Delete 2. If you're sure that a quarantined file is a false positive, then select it and click the Restore button at the bottom. You can save a list of these files to your PC (as a Notepad file), which can be useful if, for example, you're unsure of certain files and want to email the list to someone for a second opinion. Click 'Save quarantine list' 3, select where you want to save it on your PC, name the file, then click Save.





STEP 9 The Logs section 1 keeps all your scan, quarantine and update records, accessed via tabs 2. Click to select the one you want. Select an item on the list, then click 'View details' at the bottom left to see information about it. If you want to save this file to your PC, click Export 3, select where you want to save it, rename it (optional), then click Save. To clear your records in a particular tab, click the Clear button at the bottom right, then click Yes. Finally, click the Settings option 4.

STEP 10 Here, you can choose to test beta versions of Emsisoft Emergency Kit as soon as they're released (these will introduce new features, but may also contain bugs). If you're prepared to deal with that, tick 'Install beta updates', then click Yes. The first time you close the program, you'll see a window asking if you want to receive security tips for free via email. Tick 'Don't ask again' 1 and click Close 2. Whenever you launch the program, remember to click the Update tile on the left to ensure you update the program's virus definitions before you run your scans.

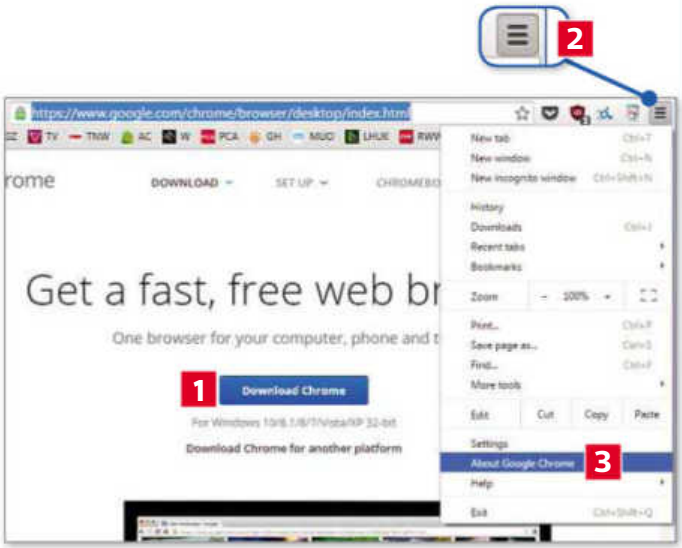
Add Edge's browser tools to Chrome

What you need: Google Chrome; Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8 or 10
Time required: 25 minutes

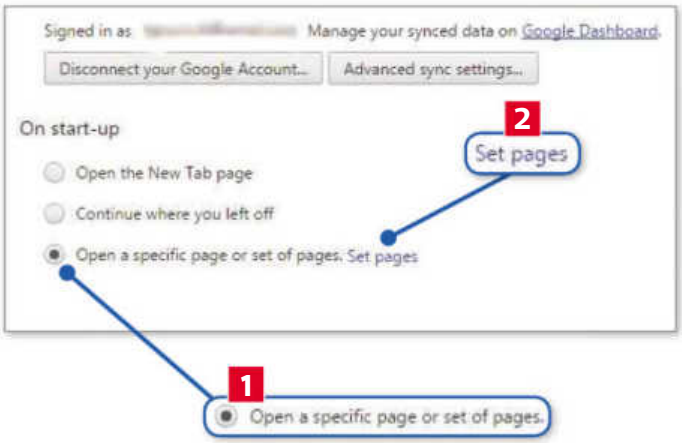
Windows 10's new browser Microsoft Edge has some brilliant features that you won't find by default in other browsers. These include speaking your search terms; adding scribbles/highlighted sections to web pages, then emailing these as screenshots; and removing adverts from web pages.

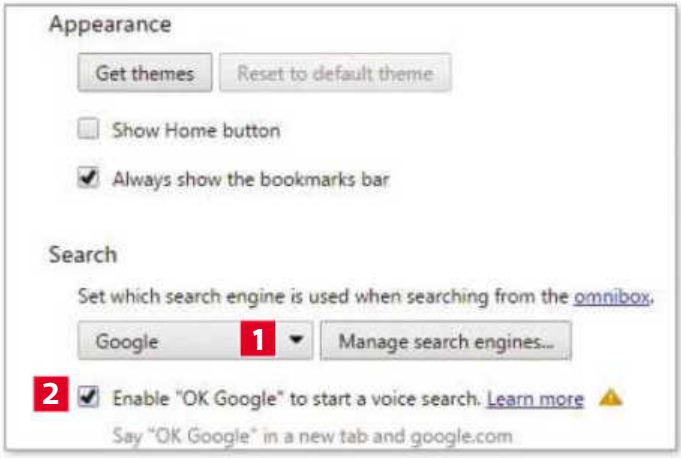
However, Google Chrome remains our favourite browser because – unlike Edge – it supports extensions and works in all versions of Windows. We'll show you how to tweak Chrome's settings and add extensions to get Edge's best tools in Google's browser.

STEP 1 If you don't already have Chrome, download and install it for free from www.snipca.com/17644. Click Download Chrome 1, run the setup file and follow the onscreen instructions. If you already use it, update Chrome to the latest version (44 at the time of writing). To do that, click the Chrome menu button 2, then click About Google Chrome 3. The browser will check for pending updates and you'll be prompted to restart it if there are any.



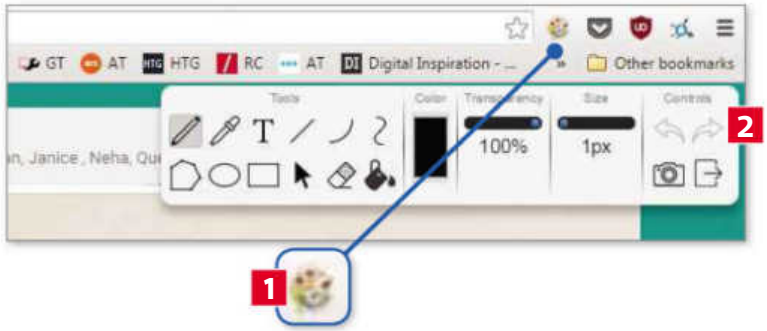
STEP 2 Windows 10 comes with Microsoft's voice assistant Cortana built in. As long as your PC has a mic, you can click the search bar at the bottom left of your screen, speak search terms and the results will show up in Edge. Chrome has a similar feature, but it's not enabled by default. Before enabling this, you should set your homepage to Google UK. To do that, click the Chrome menu button, then Settings. Now, select 'Open a specific page or set of pages' 1 in the 'On start-up' section, then click the 'Set pages' link 2. Next, type www.google.co.uk in the 'Add a new page' field, then click OK.





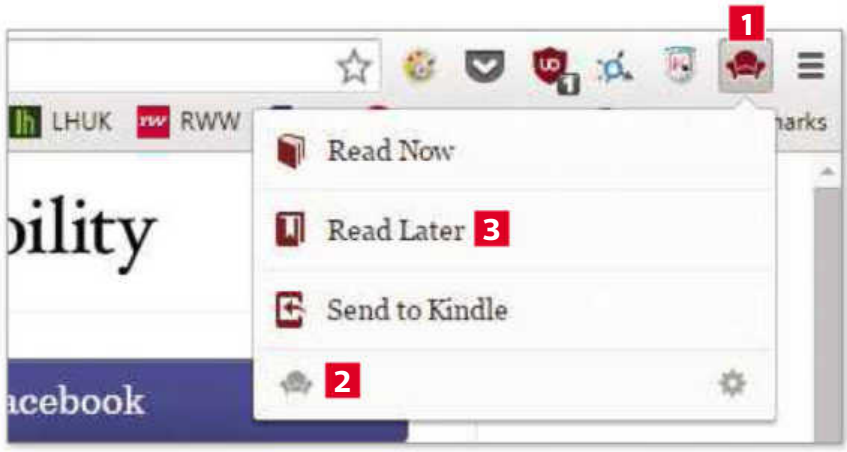
STEP 3 Next, scroll down to the Search section. Ensure Google is set as your primary search engine 1, then tick 'Enable "OK Google" to start a voice search' 2. Now whenever you open Chrome or a new tab, you can simply ask a question out loud (for example, "What's the weather going to be like in Edinburgh tomorrow?") to see search results in your browser. Alternatively, click the mic icon in the search bar of the Google UK homepage to bring up a 'Speak now' screen, then speak your search term.

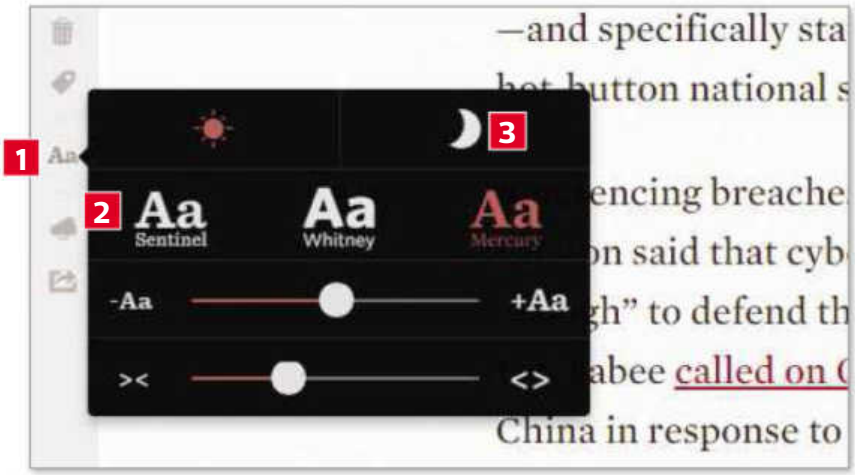
STEP 4 Another unique feature of Edge is Web Notes, which lets you draw on web pages – ideal if you want to highlight specific items on a web page, then send this as a screenshot to someone. Chrome has an extension called Web Paint that lets you do the same thing. To add it, go to www.snipca.com/17645, click the blue 'Add to Chrome' button, then click the Add button. Now whenever you want to draw or highlight something on a web page, click the Web Paint extension (a palette icon) 1. You'll see a menu with five sections – Tools, Color, Transparency, Size and Controls 2.



STEP 5 Click the Color section and select a colour from the palette 1. If you want thicker lines, move the slider in the Size section to the right. Now select one of the shapes in the Tools section, then click and draw/highlight 2 whatever you want on the web page. You'll find Undo and Redo options at the top of the Controls section. To clear your page, click the 'Clean up' option 3. As with Edge, it's easy to create then email a screenshot of your scribbles. First, click the Camera icon 4 in the Controls section. You'll see a new tab with four buttons (Download, Print, 'Copy to Clipboard' and Crop) at the top left. Select Download, then email the file (you'll find it in your Downloads folder) to whoever you want.

STEP 6 Another great feature in Edge is Reading View mode, which removes adverts from a web page, lets you customise its font size, change its background theme and save it to your Reading List to read later. Chrome can do all this too via its brilliant extension Readability. To add it, go to www.snipca.com/17647, click the blue 'Add to Chrome' button, then Add. You'll now see a Readability icon (red armchair) 1 in your toolbar. Click it to see three options – Read Now, Read Later and 'Send to Kindle', along with the Reading List icon 2. First, click Read Later 3, then click Using Your Email to create a free Readability account.





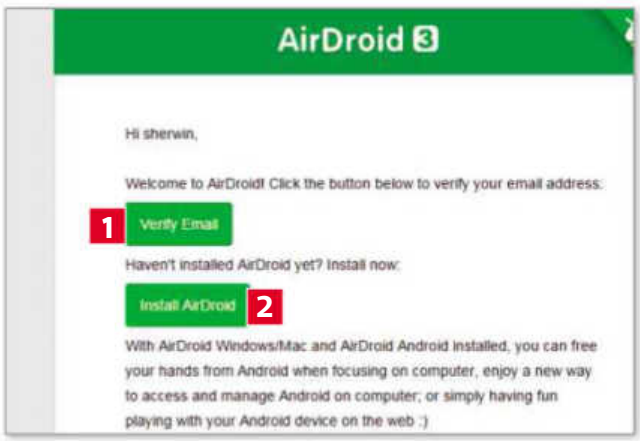
STEP 7 Now, whenever you want to save an article to read later, click the extension, then Read Later (or Read Now). If you use an Amazon Kindle, you can email the article to your device by clicking 'Send to Kindle', entering your Kindle's email address, then clicking 'Set Up & Send'. To see a list of your saved articles, click the extension, then the Reading List icon. To customise the font style, font size and line spacing of your articles, click the Aa icon 1 on the left.
You can now change the article's font size and spacing using the sliders and choose from three font styles 2. To switch to Night Mode (white text on a black background, which is easier on your eyes and ideal for reading in darker conditions) click the half-moon icon 3. ●

See Android app notifications on your PC

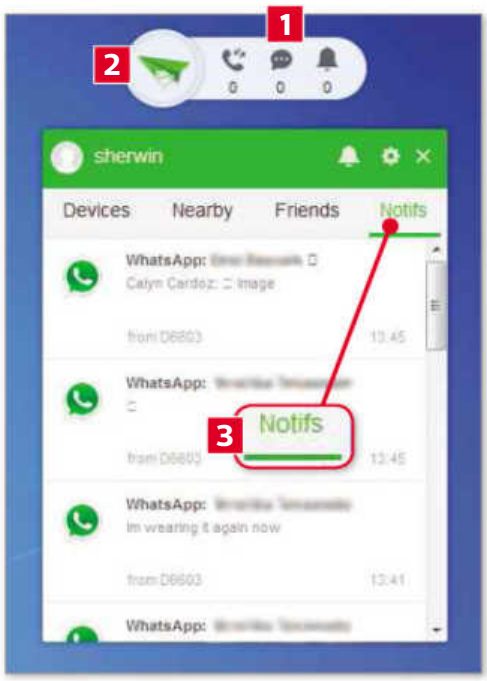
What you need: AirDroid; Android phone or tablet; PC **Time required:** 20 minutes

If when using your PC you find yourself getting constantly sidetracked by notifications on your Android device, you should install AirDroid. This brilliant free app lets you see all your device's notifications as pop-ups on your PC screen. The latest version lets you reply to messages (standard texts and WhatsApp) and even respond to calls from your PC. This gives it a slight edge over Pushbullet, which lets you see all Android and iOS notifications on your PC, but only lets you respond to Android text messages.

STEP 1 First, download the free AirDroid app on your Android device from www.snipca.com/17654. Open the app, tap the 'Sign In or Sign Up' button, then tap the 'Sign up' link at the bottom to create a free account. Enter your email address 1, password (twice) and nickname 2(optional), then tap Sign Up 3. Next, tap the Enable link. This will take you to the 'Notification access' settings screen on your device. Tick the AirDroid Notification Mirror option, then tap OK.

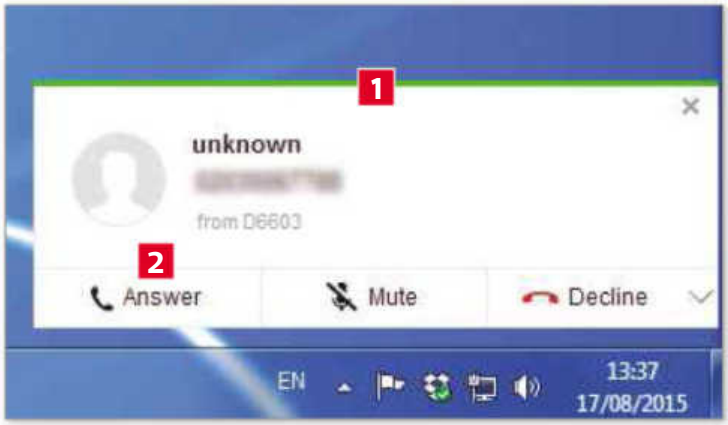


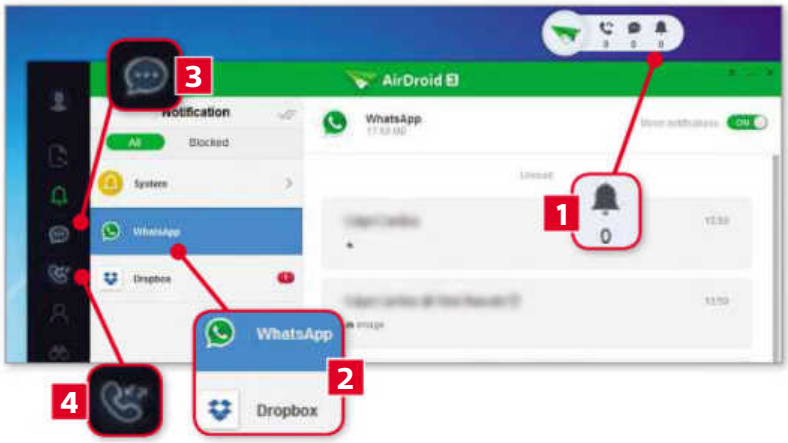
STEP 2 On your PC, go to the inbox of the email you provided in Step 1 and open the email from AirDroid. First, click Verify Email 1. A new browser tab will open with a 'Successfully verified' notification. Now return to the email and click Install AirDroid 2. The program will start downloading to your PC. Run the setup file and click OK, Next, I Agree, Install and Finish to open the program on your PC.



STEP 3 Next, enter the login details you created in Step 1, tick 'Stay signed in', then click 'Sign in'. You'll see a small floating AirDroid widget on your Desktop, which you can click and drag where you want. The widget has three icons 1 – a phone icon for calls, a speech bubble for text messages, and a bell icon for notifications from other apps. You can also see your notifications by clicking the AirDroid icon 2, then clicking the Notifs tab 3.

STEP 4 Now any notification you receive on your phone and tablet will appear as a pop-up at the bottom right of your PC screen 1. You can respond to some notifications – including calls and messages received by text, WhatsApp Messenger and Facebook Messenger – directly from your PC. To respond to a message, move your cursor to the pop-up to see three options (Reply, Dismiss and Block). To reply, click that option, type your reply, then click Send. You can also accept, mute or dismiss calls from your PC (but not carry out a conversation). To accept a call, click Answer 2, then click OK to continue the call on your device.

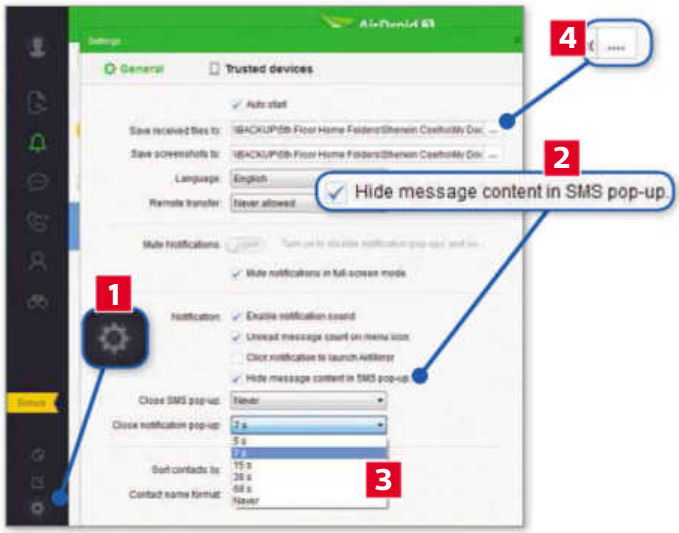




STEP 5 All notifications are listed in the widget. Click the bell icon 1, for example, to see your notifications from various apps – listed in separate sections on the left 2. Click the text message 3 or Call icons 4 on the left to read your device's text messages and view your call history. If you find the floating AirDroid widget distracting, you can increase its transparency or remove it completely. To do the former, right-click the widget, move your cursor to Transparency at the bottom, then select one of the five values. If you'd rather not see it at all, click 'Hide the widget forever' after right-clicking.

STEP 6 AirDroid also lets you transfer files (photos, videos and audio files) from your PC to your phone and tablet or vice versa. To transfer files from PC to device, open the AirDroid program, click the File Transfer icon 1, click the Attach icon 2, navigate to the file(s) you want to send, then click Open. You'll see a notification on your device confirming the file has been received. To send files from your device to your PC, open the AirDroid app on your device, tap File Transfer, AirDroid Desktop, then tap the small '+' symbol at the bottom left. You'll see options to send Photos, Music and Videos. Tap the option you want, tick to select the files you want to send, tap Send, then OK. The files will appear instantly in your Desktop program.

STEP 7 AirDroid has useful settings that let you control how notifications appear on your PC. First, click the Settings (cog) icon 1 within AirDroid on your PC. If you want to hide the contents of your text messages in the notifications pop-ups, tick 'Hide message content in SMS pop-up' 2. By default, notification pop-ups stay on your screen for seven seconds, but you can change this from the 'Close notification pop-up' dropdown menu 3. Any files transferred to your PC are saved to a default folder, but if you want to change this location, click the three dots beside 'Save received files to' 4, navigate to the folder you want, then click OK.



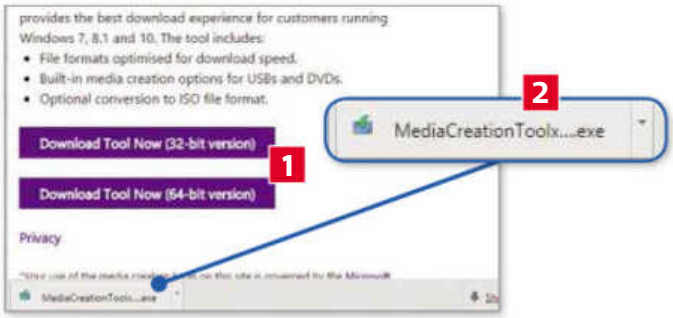
Computer active
YOUR HOME FOR WINDOWS 10 ADVICE

Try Windows 10 without downloading it

What you need: Windows 7 or 8.1; VirtualBox **Time required:** 1 hour

In our lead Workshop in Issue 443, we showed you how to install the Windows 10 Technical Preview in a virtual drive using the free program VirtualBox. If you'd like to try the final version of Windows 10 before deciding whether to upgrade, you can also set it up in VirtualBox first, but the process for doing so differs from that used for the Technical Preview. First, ensure your PC meets the minimum Windows 10 system requirements (www.snipca.com/17588) and that you have at least 30GB of free space on your C Drive.

STEP 1 First, you need to download the free Windows 10 Media Creation Tool from www.snipca.com/17584. Scroll down to the bottom of the page, click the version that corresponds to your PC's operating system 1 (to find this, right-click Computer, click Properties and look under 'System type'), then run the downloaded file 2. In the Windows 10 Setup window, select 'Create installation media for another PC' and click Next. Now select your language (English UK), edition (probably Windows 10 Home) and architecture (64bit or 32bit) using the dropdown menus. On the next screen, select 'ISO file', then click Next. Now navigate to where you want to save the file on your PC, then click Save.



STEP 2 While that's downloading, install VirtualBox. Go to www.snipca.com/17586 and click the 'x86/amd64' link beside 'VirtualBox 5.0 for Windows hosts'. Run the downloaded setup file, click Next (three times), Yes, Install, then Finish. Now click New, type Windows 10 in the Name field (the Type and Version dropdown menus should fill in automatically), then click Next. Click Create, Next, select Fixed, then click Next again. You now need to allocate space from your hard drive to your virtual drive. Drag the slider to 30GB, click Create and wait for the allocation process to finish. Next, click the Start button 1, the small folder icon 2, navigate to the Windows 10 ISO file you downloaded (in Step 1), click Open, then click Start 3.

STEP 3 You'll see the Windows 10 logo in VirtualBox. Set your language, time and keyboard to English (United Kingdom) 1, then click Next 2. When prompted for your product key, click Skip at the bottom right. Next, tick to accept the terms at the bottom left, click Next, select 'Custom: Install Windows only (advanced)', then click Next and wait for Windows to finish installing. Again, you'll be prompted for your product key. Click the 'Do this later' link at the bottom left, then click 'Use Express settings' and Windows 10 will begin to boot. Enter your Microsoft account details when prompted. Now whenever you need to use Windows 10, simply open VirtualBox and click the green Start button.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 16 Sept

- Make Windows 10 safe and private
- Find out if your ISP is overcharging you
- Add virtual Desktops to Windows 7 and 8
- Use superb new Kindle tools

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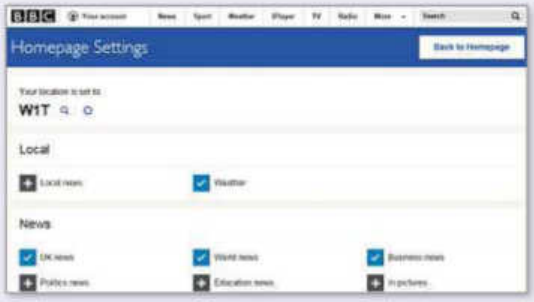
TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Customise the BBC website to read the news that interests you

I recently noticed a banner at the top of the BBC Homepage (www.bbc.co.uk) informing me it would be changing soon and suggesting I give it a go before it launches officially. You first need to create a BBC account or log into your existing account (by clicking 'Sign in' at the top left). Next, click the blue 'Take Me There' at the top right, then click 'Customise your Homepage' at the top left.

Click the Allow button when asked for your location because this lets you receive local weather and news updates.



You'll now see seven sections - Local, News, Sport, Entertainment, Culture, Living and 'Science and Technology'. Each has a list of news topics – for example, 'UK news', 'World news' and 'Education news' in the News section (see screenshot). Some of these are already ticked, while others have a '+' symbol beside them.

Click the '+' symbol beside the topics that interest you within each section (or untick any pre-ticked items). When you've finished, click 'Back to Homepage' at the top right.

You'll see the weather forecast for in your area at the top right, and each news section will now reflect the choices you made.

Greg Walsh

The winner of every Tip of the Fortnight wins this exclusive Computeractive mug!

UNINSTALLER SOFTWARE

Uninstall programs completely to reclaim storage space

I tried to uninstall some programs from my PC that I no longer use, but for some reason was unable to do this via the Control Panel. After researching online, I stumbled upon the free version of IObit Uninstaller (www.snipca.com/17712). I was apprehensive at first because IObit is notorious for bundling programs without your permission during installation, but thankfully this new version (5) installed without unwanted extras.

When you open the program you'll see four sections at the top left (All Programs, Recently Installed, Large Programs and Infrequently Used). Select the section that's likely to contain the program you want to uninstall, then click the green bin icon beside the program. Next, tick 'Create Restore before uninstalling', then click Uninstall. If the program has any leftover files in other locations on your PC, you'll see these ticked. Tick 'Shred files' below, then click the Delete button to remove them completely. You'll now see a message telling you any leftover files will be removed on the next reboot of your PC. I reclaimed 11GB after uninstalling four programs this way.

Colin Blake

PHOTO MANAGEMENT

Save pictures to Google Photos more easily

I have dozens of photo albums scattered across my PC, which I wanted to import into Google Photos. A friend tipped me off about a lesser-known Google Photos program for your PC that lets you do this in a few steps.

Go to www.snipca.com/17713 and click the Desktop Uploader link on the left. Run the setup file, then log into your Google account. You'll now see a 'Choose backup sources' section in which your 'Cameras & Storage Cards' (basically any external devices connected to your PC), Desktop and My Pictures folder on your PC will be ticked by default (see screenshot left). To import photos from other locations, click the Add button, navigate to the folder you want, then click OK. In the 'Photo size' section below, select the storage plan you want. When you've finished, click the 'Start backup' button at the bottom right, then OK. The photos will now start uploading to your Google Photos account.

Ken Leachman

MOVIE STREAMING

Watch Netflix films with someone who's far away

My wife and I love to watch films together on Netflix and discuss them afterwards. But my new job means I'm travelling the country a lot and we don't get the chance to do this so much anymore.

Thankfully, I discovered a free Chrome extension called Showgoers that lets you sync Netflix playback across two PCs, wherever they are. To install it (on both PCs), go to www.snipca.com/17714, click the 'Add to Chrome' button, then Add. Now when you log into Netflix and start a film (or TV show), you'll see a glasses-shaped icon at the top right. Click this and you'll see a long URL, with buttons below it. Click 'Copy to Clipboard' and send the link to the person who's going to watch the movie with you (they will need their own Netflix account). Lastly, click the Begin Sync button.

When the other person logs into Netflix and clicks the link, the movie will sync on both PCs. If either person pauses the movie, it'll pause on both PCs.

Brian Holden

Phone and Tablet Tips

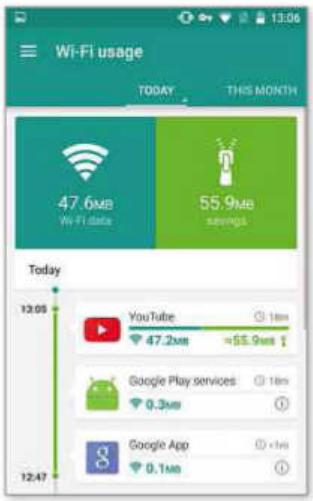
Brilliant things to do on your device

ANDROID

Watch videos without using up your data allowance and battery

If you'd like to stream Netfllix films and YouTube videos on your device, but refrain from doing so for fear of using up your mobile data allowance and draining your device's battery, then you're in luck. Opera Max is a free app that compresses mobile data used by any app on your device. The latest update ensures you can compress mobile data used by Netflix and YouTube by anything up to 50 per cent. This results in videos loading faster and less data usage (regardless of whether you're using Wi-Fi or mobile data). It also prolongs your device's battery life.

Open the app (www.snipca.com/17691), swipe across the introductory screens, tap 'Agree and Continue', then Connect. You'll be prompted to set up a VPN connection; tap OK. You'll now see a small key icon in your device's notification area, which indicates that the app is running in the background. While the app's description insists you won't lose any picture quality, we noticed a (very) slight drop in YouTube's quality, but videos did load much faster.



Use your device as normal for a while, then open the Opera Max app. At the bottom, you'll see a breakdown of all the apps you've used since installing Opera Max (see screenshot below). On the green line below the app's title the dark section represents data used, while the light section denotes the amount of data Opera Max has saved you. As you'll see from the YouTube stats in our screenshot, Opera Max lived up to its promises.

ANDROID & iOS

Add pro edits to your photos

Google's Snapseed is one of the most highly rated photo-editing apps for both Android (www.snipca.com/17692) and iOS (www.snipca.com/17693). Its interface was recently revamped, making it much easier to use. As well as the usual features (cropping, rotating and controlling brightness and contrast levels), the app lets you add professional-level effects, including Lens Blur. This lets you select a particular area of your photo as your focus, while blurring the rest.

To use Lens Blur, open the app, tap Open Photo, navigate to the one you want, then tap to open it. Now tap the small pen icon at the bottom right, swipe up to show the app's filters and tap Lens Blur. You'll see two concentric circles (see screenshot above). If you want to change the focal point shape from a circle to a rectangle, tap the blue circle icon at the bottom left. Tap and drag the blue dot in the middle if you want to change the area of focus.

You can change the level of blur intensity in the rest of the photo by tapping anywhere outside the second

Best New Apps

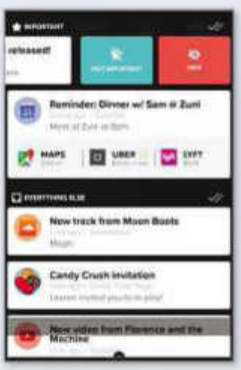
What you should install this fortnight

Snowball

Free

Android: www.snipca.com/17697

This app is a godsend if you're constantly bombarded with irrelevant notifications from various apps. Simply swipe the notification to the right, then tap Hide and alerts from that app won't appear again. You can also reply to text messages directly from the notification, saving you precious time.



Microsoft Translator

Free

Android: www.snipca.com/17698

iOS: www.snipca.com/17699

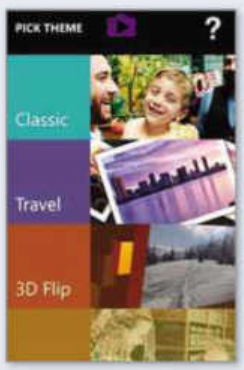
Apart from instantly translating text from one language to another (50 are supported), this Microsoft app lets you listen to a correct pronunciation of your translated text. You can also 'bookmark' translations you're likely to need when you're offline while travelling abroad.

Photo Story

Free

Windows Phone: www.snipca.com/17700

The second Microsoft app in this issue (see left) is a great way to document a memorable event. Select a day, pick a theme (Classic, Travel or 3D Flip) and a soundtrack (Rock, Piano Dance or Sunrise). The app then automatically picks the best photos from that day and creates a montage-style video.



circle, then swiping from left to right. Tap and hold the rectangular icon at the top right to see your original image, so you can compare the two. When you're happy with your edits, tap the tick icon at the bottom right, then tap Save at the top right.

iOS

Ask Google for more information based on what you're reading

Google's brilliant search app (www.snipca.com/17694) provides a list of relevant web articles based on your interests and previous search terms. For example, if you follow the footballing fortunes of Manchester City and Barcelona, and recently searched for *Top Gear*, Edinburgh and *Game of Thrones*, you'll see content based on those topics.

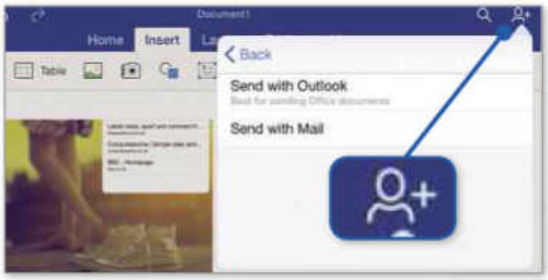
The latest version of the app now lets you say 'Ok Google' to activate Google's voice assistant (you previously had to tap the mic icon to do this). You can then ask a question, such as 'Who is George RR Martin?' (the *Game of Thrones* author) and Google will respond with a page of relevant results. What's even better is that you can also ask contextual questions, such as 'Where was he born?' if you happen to be reading an article about George RR Martin, and Google will automatically pull up the relevant search result.

iOS

Attach Office files to an Outlook email more easily

Microsoft has updated all its free iOS Office apps, making it easier to attach a file to an Outlook email without having to open the email app. We'll show you how to attach a Word document to Outlook from within Word (you can use the same steps to attach any Excel sheets and PowerPoint presentations you've created on your device). First, make sure you have the free Word (www.snipca.com/17695) and Outlook (www.snipca.com/17696) apps installed on your iPad or iPhone.

Open Word, tap 'Blank document' and create a new document. If you want to take a photo or insert a table/image, tap the Insert tab at the top, tap the relevant icon (camera, table, gallery), take your picture/navigate to your item, then attach it. To attach your document to an



Outlook email from within Word, first tap the Share icon (the outline of a person with a '+' symbol) at the top right (see screenshot above), tap Send Attachment, Document (you can also tap PDF), then tap 'Send with Outlook'. You'll see the file attached to a new email in Outlook. Finally, fill in the required email fields and send it.

WINDOWS PHONE

Set your camera's timer

If you'd like to take a picture of yourself and give yourself time to strike the right pose, it's easy to set the camera's timer on your Windows Phone. Open the Lumia Camera app, tap the settings (cog) icon at the bottom right, then tap 'timer'. Now tap the Delay dropdown menu and choose either '2 seconds', '5 seconds' or '10 seconds'. Leave the box below unticked, then tap 'set'. Next, tap the bottom-left Back button, then the shutter icon to take your photo. You'll see a small circular animation and your photo will be taken after the time delay that you set. To cancel the timer, tap the same settings icon, then tap 'cancel timer'.

Games With Kids

What to play together on your phone and tablet

AGES 0-5

Elmo Loves 123s

Free www.snipca.com/17701 (Android)
£2.29 www.snipca.com/17702 (iOS)
The games, activities and videos in this *Sesame Street* app are designed to help your toddler learn about numbers. They need to trace outlines of numbers, which then unlock relevant videos, colouring pages and puzzles. As they get better, they'll learn basic addition and subtraction.

AGES 6-10

Kintsukuroi

Free www.snipca.com/17703 (Android)
Kintsukuroi is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery. In this brilliant new 3D puzzle game (with soothing background music) your child needs to rotate the screen and rebuild the pottery by placing broken pieces in the right areas. There are 20 levels in total and two modes (Timed and Normal).

AGES 11-16

Tilt

Free www.snipca.com/17704 (Android)
Your entire family can play this game by connecting their devices via Bluetooth. You need to tilt and move your device to direct the small yellow ball through the maze and into a hole. If the ball touches an edge of your screen, the game will restart. The app keeps a tally of all participants' scores.

WINDOWS 10

Change where Microsoft Edge saves your downloaded files

By default, Microsoft Edge saves your downloaded files to the Downloads folder on your Windows 10 PC. If you'd rather save these downloads to another folder, there's an easy way to move all your downloaded files there and set it as your default location for Edge's downloads.

First, press the Windows key+E to open File Explorer. Now right-click the Downloads folder at the top left, click Properties at the bottom, then click the Location tab at the top (see screenshot below). Next, click the Move button, navigate to the folder you want to move your downloaded files to, then click Select Folder. Click Yes to move all files from the Downloads folder to this new location. Now click Apply, then OK. In future, whenever you download a file from Microsoft Edge, it will appear in this location.

WINDOWS VISTA, 7, 8, 10

See the number of pages and word count in a document without opening it

There's an easy way to find out how many pages and words there are in document without having to open it. First, make sure all the documents whose page/word counts you want to find are in the same folder.

In Windows 7, click the 'More options' dropdown menu at the top right of the folder, then click Details. In Windows 8 and 10, click the View tab at the top, then select 'Details pane' at the top left. You'll see your files as a list with four column headers – Name, 'Date modified', Type and Size. Right-click any of these headers and click More at the bottom. You'll now see a list of criteria with boxes (the four column headers will already be ticked). Scroll down the list, tick Pages and 'Word count', then click OK. You'll now see columns containing the page and word counts for your documents.

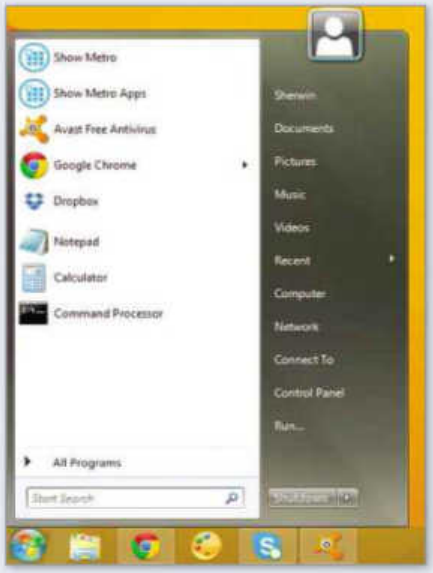
WINDOWS 8

Add a Windows 7-style Start menu to Windows 8

Even Microsoft conceded it was a bad idea to remove Windows 7's familiar Start menu from Windows 8 – a problem they've now rectified in Windows 10. There are many Windows 8 Start menu alternatives (free and paid-for), but the one that most closely resembles Windows 7 – in terms of both appearance and features – is the free program Start Menu Vistart 8.

To install it, go to www.snipca.com/17735 and click the Download Start Menu link. Now open the downloaded setup file, click Next, Accept, select Windows 7 Start Menu, then click OK. The Start button at the bottom left of your screen will change to a round icon (as in Windows 7).

Click it and you'll see a Start menu that's identical to Windows 7 (see screenshot). It even has links to your Control Panel, Computer, Documents and Pictures on the right-hand side. To add programs to the Start menu, simply drag them from the Desktop and drop them on the Start button. To access the Modern-tile interface, open the Start menu, then click Show Metro. Alternatively, you can move your cursor to the bottom-left edge of your screen, wait until the Start button changes to the Windows 8 version, then click that.



WINDOWS VISTA, 7, 8

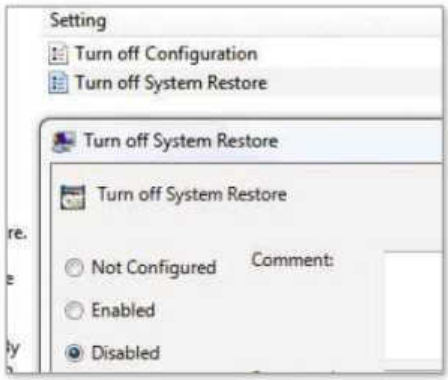
Fix the 'System Restore turned off' error message

System Restore can be a life-saver for your PC because it lets you roll back your PC to an earlier state undoing any problematic changes you've made. To open it, press the Windows key, type system restore, then press Enter.

If you see an error message saying: 'System Restore has been turned off by group policy. To turn on System Restore, contact your administrator', then it's likely that something you installed has corrupted System Restore on your PC. Thankfully, there's an easy fix, which involves temporarily disabling System Restore, then restarting it.

To do this, press the Windows Key+R to open the Run dialogue box, type gpedit.msc, then press Enter to open your Group Policy Editor. Next, click the small dropdown menu to the left of the Administrative Templates folder at the top left. Click the dropdown menu beside the System folder, then click the System Restore folder.

Now double-click 'Turn off System Restore' at the top right, select Disabled (see screenshot below), then click OK at the bottom. Next, double-click 'Turn off Configuration' and set it to Disabled in the same way. Finally, close all your programs and restart your PC. When it boots, open System Restore (see start of tip) and it should appear without the error message.



OUTLOOK

Assign individual notification sounds to your email contacts

In the past we've showed you how to use Outlook's powerful Rules feature to automatically send emails from specific people straight to certain folders. Another useful Rules feature lets you assign a particular notification sound to emails arriving from a specific contact. As long as your speakers are switched on, you'll be able to identify the source of your latest email without even having to look at your notification.

First, open Outlook and navigate to an email from someone you'd like to assign a sound to. Next, click the Rules option (in the Move section of the Home tab), then click Create Rule. Tick the contact's name at the top. You can also tick the two fields below ('Subject contains' and 'Send to') if you want to set those as further criteria.

You'll notice that 'Play a selected sound' is ticked, with Windows Notify.wav selected as the default sound for incoming Outlook emails (see screenshot). Click the play icon to hear it. Now click the Browse button to open a folder containing dozens of sounds (including your PC's boot, error message and shut down tones). Right-click any sound, then click Play to listen to it in your default media player.

When you're happy with your selection, click Open, then click OK (twice) to set it as your default sound for all emails from that sender.

WORD

Rearrange paragraphs quickly

There's an easy way to rearrange paragraphs quickly without having to cut and paste each one to a different location in your document. The trick is to first assign every paragraph a number, then simply use Word's Sort function to order the paragraphs numerically.

First, you need to add a number to the start of your paragraphs according to how you want to order them. For example, type 3 at the start of the second paragraph, type 1 at the start of the third and 2 at the start of the first. Next, highlight these paragraphs, then click the Sort option (The AZ icon in the Paragraph section of the Home tab – see screenshot below). You'll notice that your paragraphs will be ordered according to the number you typed at the start of each. Don't forget to then delete the numbers.

EXCEL

Add rows to your sheet using keyboard shortcuts

Excel may seem quite overwhelming at times, but there are lots of keyboard shortcuts that make it easier to use. For example, if you find yourself constantly creating new rows, you can always use the standard method of right-clicking the row, clicking Insert, selecting 'Entire row', then clicking OK. However, the two keyboard shortcuts explained below makes this process much faster.

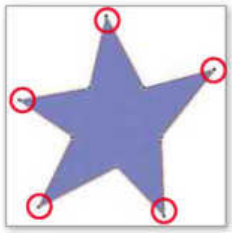
The first involves clicking a cell in the row above where you want to add a new row. Press the Shift key+Spacebar and the cell's entire row will be highlighted. Next, press Ctrl+Shift and the '+' key and a new row will be added directly below the one you've highlighted. Repeat this to add as many rows as you want.

The second method is to again press Shift+Spacebar to select the row. Now press the right-click key on your keyboard (see screenshot below), along with the 'I' key and a new row will be added. Repeat this to add as many new rows as you want.

POWERPOINT

Modify default shapes to create your own

You can add a variety of shapes to your PowerPoint presentation, but did you know that it's easy to modify one of the default shapes to create your own? Click the Insert tab, the Shapes dropdown menu (in the Illustrations section), then click to select the shape you want to modify. Now click and drag the shape to where you want it in your slide. You can now customise this using the colours and effects options in the Shape Styles section (of the Insert tab).



To modify the shape further, simply right-click it, then click Edit Points. You'll see black marker points at every intersection of the shape (see screenshot above). Now click any marker point and drag it wherever you want to modify your shape. When you're happy with it, click anywhere outside the shape to finalise it.

Control Panel

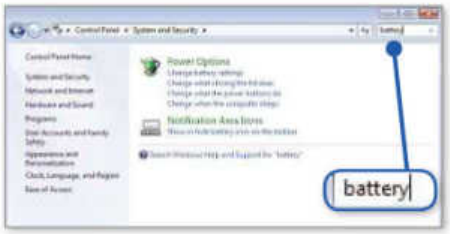
Launch tools by typing, turn Control Panel into a menu and create shortcuts for your favourite options

Make shortcuts for favourite controls

You can turn your most-used Control Panel tools into Windows Desktop shortcuts, so they're to hand when you need them. First, switch to one of the Control Panel's icon views by clicking Category next to 'View by', then choose either 'Large icons' or 'Small icons'. Now find the tool you want, right-click it, choose 'Create shortcut' (or 'Pin to Start' in Windows 8 and later). You can even add a shortcut for Control Panel itself. Click Start then right-click Control Panel and click 'Show on Desktop'.

Find controls with search

Control Panel is sprawling (and rather all over the place in Window 8.1 and 10), so use search to find what you want quickly. Launch Control Panel as usual then click in the Search box at the top right, and type whatever you're looking for. This is also a really good way to find things when you're not entirely sure what you need – this is because items related to your search term are also shown. So, for example, searching for 'battery' will show Power Options, and 'monitor' will list display-related tools.



Use Control Panel's search box to find things quickly, even if you don't know the terminology

Launch Control Panel tools by typing

For some people, typing is quicker than clicking, so it's good to know that many elements of Control Panel can be accessed by entering a command in the Start menu or Start screen. For example, type desk.cpl and press Enter to be immediately directed to Control Panel's display settings. There are loads more commands like this. See Microsoft's own list at www.snipca.com/17449.

Many aspects of the Control Panel can be accessed by typing commands into the Start menu or screen

Find Control Panel quickly in Windows 10

If you're struggling to hunt down the traditional Control Panel in Windows 10 (or Windows 8/8.1) for that matter, just press Windows key+X to open what Microsoft calls the Quick Link menu. Here you'll see an entry for Control Panel – just click it.

Turn Control Panel into a menu

If you use Windows Vista or 7 then Control Panel can be turned into a submenu of the Start menu. Click Start, then right-click any blank part of the menu and choose Properties. On the Start Menu tab click the Customize button followed by the 'Display as a menu' button under Control Panel. Click OK. To reverse this change, repeat but this time choose the 'Display as a link' button.

Open multiple Control Panels

If you're working in Category view (see the first tip) and have clicked to drill down through a category, you can open each subsequent panel in its own window – useful for juggling multiple Control Panel tools. Right-click a Control Panel category heading (such as Power Options or Action Center) then choose 'Open in new window'.

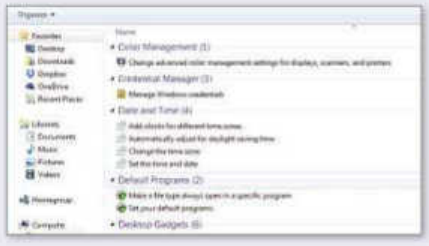
Explore Control Panel with Windows Explorer

If you're still using Windows XP, there's a trick just for you: you can navigate and launch important Control Panel items from within Windows Explorer (Windows key+E to launch that). Click the Folders button at the top then, in the left-hand pane, click My Computer followed by Control Panel. Now click the relevant heading to find what you want.

Enable God mode

If your PC runs Windows Vista or later there's a tool called God Mode that puts every single element of Control Panel into a folder for instant access.

It's simple to activate but you must be careful because making a mistake could cause problems for your PC. All you have to do is create a folder called **GodMode.{ED7BA470-8E54-465E-825C-99712043E01C}**. You can create this folder anywhere but it's important to get the code exactly right. So, either type very carefully or – better still – cut and paste it from the Wikipedia page at www.snipca.com/17439. Then just open the folder to see all the features (see screenshot).



We'll let you into a secret here – you don't need to call your folder 'GodMode'! You can actually use any name before the full stop, so **Computeractive.{ED7BA470-8E54-465E-825C-99712043E01C}** works just as well.

Next issue Secret Tips For... Your second monitor

Cloudbooks

Yes, it's yet another type of laptop – just what you've been waiting for...

What are they?

Acer's new range of cheap, fast and light laptops. They come with Windows 10 Home, but are designed to be used in the 'cloud'.

What does that mean?

It means you should forget about downloading software to it. Instead it's a device for doing everything online that you currently use Desktop-based programs for, including composing emails, editing documents, and saving videos and photos.

How much are they?

The cheapest one – the Aspire One Cloudbook 11 – costs £180, has an 11-inch screen and comes with a 16GB SSD. A second 11-inch Cloudbook with a 32GB SSD will be more expensive, though Acer has yet to confirm by how much. Both will go on sale in the UK in September.

A month later Acer's 14-inch Cloudbooks will arrive. There are two models: the 32GB Cloudbook will cost £200, while pricing for the 64GB version hasn't been announced.

So are they just basic Windows 10 laptops?

In a way yes – these are not supercomputers. They are powered by the Intel Celeron processor, found in many budget laptops, and come with only 2GB of RAM. These low specifications mean that Cloudbooks don't require fans to keep them cool, and are therefore very quiet. The lightest model weighs just 1.15kg, the same as this bag of oranges from Iceland (www.snipca.com/17573), though we don't recommend using it while eating these (keyboards react badly to citric acid).

Acer's Cloudbooks come with a year's free subscription to Office 365

What about battery life?

Good point. It's between six to seven hours, according to Acer. Also – crucially – they come with 802.11ac Wi-Fi, which is the latest and fastest technology for doing things online.

Are they like Chromebooks?

Yes. Both are low-powered laptops that are ideal for browsing the web, but not for more intensive PC tasks. And they're similarly priced (see our four-star review of the £215 Dell Chromebook 11 in Issue 455, for example). The biggest difference is that a Cloudbook comes with Windows 10, which it will have to load every time it switches on. That means it'll probably take more time to start up than a Chromebook, which only has to load the very basic Chrome OS. People who use Chromebooks love how quickly they start up (typically in less than 10 seconds). However, Cloudbooks will still feel like a hare compared with your tortoise of a PC.

Acer would have been thrilled by some industry analysts predicting that Cloudbooks will kill Chromebooks. To help convert those currently using the latter, Acer is offering some web freebies with each Cloudbook.

Ooh! Such as. . .?

A year's free subscription to Office 365 (www.snipca.com/17574), Microsoft's business-focused version of Office 2013, which normally costs £79.99. This will interest you if you want more powerful, advanced office tools. You also get 1TB of free storage in Microsoft's OneDrive, and access to Acer's online apps for editing photos, writing documents, organising files and making music (these have been given the annoying name 'abApps': www.acer.com/abapps).

Should I buy one?

We wouldn't like to say until we review one, which will happen soon. Because Cloudbooks run Windows we think they will appeal to people tempted by Chromebooks, but who still seek the familiarity of an operating system. In other words, if Chromebooks feel like too big a leap, the Cloudbook could be the perfect compromise.

Windows 10 PROBLEMS FIXED

PART ONE Windows 10 is giving you a lot of headaches. In Part One of a special series, our Problems Solved team of experts tackle readers' most common irritations

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Fix the dreaded 'reboot loop' that's causing misery to millions
- Make the 'upgrade to Windows 10' icon appear on your Taskbar
- Find out if your graphics card is compatible with Windows 10
- Discover why Windows 10 removed your antivirus

We knew there would be teething troubles with Windows 10, but we weren't expecting such a wide outbreak of abscesses, decay and loose fillings. Our Problems Solved experts know nothing about dentistry, but they know a thing or two about computers, and have spent every day since 29 July investigating the flaws within Windows 10. They are now ready to share their solutions to 12 of the most persistent problems you've emailed to us.

If your problem isn't fixed here, don't worry. We'll keep the 'Windows 10: Problems Solved' series running for as long as our inbox is overflowing with your questions (email them to **noproblem@computeractive.co.uk**). Look out for Part Two in Issue 458 – on sale Wednesday 16 September.

1. Why does my PC keep rebooting with Windows 10 installed?

Q I installed Windows 10 and all was fine for a few days. Then I was told my PC needed to restart following an update, so I let it do so. The update failed, saying it could not complete. My PC then restarted and said again the update needed to be installed. This happened again and again. What's gone wrong, and is there any way out if this endless reboot loop?

Megan Smalle

A What went wrong is Microsoft decided it'd be a good idea to force Windows 10 users to download and install updates – and then promptly issued a faulty update! The offending update is KB3081424 (www.snipca.com/17656). Should something go wrong during installation the update tries again, compounding the problem.

Download Windows 10 updates manually on Microsoft's Catalog Update website

It hasn't affected everybody, but there's nothing you could've done to avoid it. Some non-Microsoft types figured out a workaround that involved editing the Registry, but this is no longer necessary because Microsoft has fixed the problem with an update. At the time of writing, the latest update is KB3081438.

As with other Windows 10 updates this should install automatically. To hurry it along, click Start, type window update followed by 'Check for updates', then click the 'Check for updates button'.

If the update still isn't showing as available you should download it manually from Microsoft's Catalog Update website. Visit www.snipca.com/17658, click the Add button next to the relevant version (for 32bit or 64bit Windows 10), then click 'view basket' followed by Download. Double-click the downloaded file (with the .msu extension) then follow the prompts. Annoyingly, you'll need to do all this in Internet Explorer, because the Catalog Update site isn't yet compatible with Microsoft's new browser Edge, and doesn't work in Chrome or Firefox.

Computer active
YOUR HOME FOR WINDOWS 10 ADVICE

2. Why did my laptop shut down during installation?

Q A few hours into downloading and installing Windows 10 on my Windows 8.1 Acer laptop, I had to pop out on an unexpected urgent visit. When I returned my laptop had shut down. When I pressed the power button it flashed five times and nothing further happened. Has the installation process ruined my laptop, or is it still running?

Rick Ormrod

A We don't think your laptop is ruined, but clearly the installation hit a problem. Did you leave the machine plugged into the mains? We ask this because a flashing power light can indicate that Windows has entered hibernation mode, which would usually occur only on battery power (when the battery is low).

Install Windows 10 by creating a DVD or USB stick

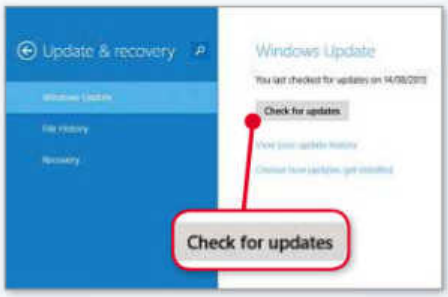
Try resetting your laptop by holding down the power button for 10-20 seconds. If nothing happens, disconnect it from the mains, remove the battery (usually by releasing clips on the underside) then once more hold down the power button for a short time. Now replace the battery, reconnect your laptop to the mains and try switching it on. Our guess is the installation will pick up from where it left off, or reverse all changes and return you to Windows 8.1.

If it starts with an error message then we'd suggest using a friend's computer to create a bootable Windows 10 DVD or USB stick (see our answer to Keith Willcocks's problem above right) and then install from there.

3. Why is there no upgrade icon on my Windows 8.1 laptop?

Q My Windows 7 desktop PC displayed the Windows 10 icon, so I reserved a copy. Both my old Gateway laptop and my wife's newer Toshiba Satellite currently run Windows 8.1 quite happily. I thought any PC that runs Windows 8.1 would run Windows 10, and both laptops meet the specifications listed on Microsoft's site. However, neither has the upgrade icon. I assume there is something that makes my laptops incompatible, but what?

Keith Willcocks



Turning off manual updates in Windows 8.1 should make the upgrade icon appear

A Yes, your Windows 8.1 laptops should run Windows 10. Do you have Windows Update set to manual? If so, it would prevent your computers from downloading the Get Windows 10 (GWT) app that puts the icon on the Windows Taskbar. Open the charms bar (Windows key+C) then click 'Change PC settings' followed by 'Update & recovery'. Click 'Check for updates' followed by Install. The GWT app icon should appear after a restart.

If not, you can download the Windows 10 ISO file and then burn it to a DVD or create a USB stick, letting you upgrade that way. Visit Microsoft's Download Windows 10 page (www.snipca.com/17632), then click either the 32bit or 64bit download tool (depending on your laptops' current Windows 8.1 versions). Double-click this downloaded file (called MediaCreationTool.exe) then follow the prompts to create a Windows 10 installation DVD/memory stick.

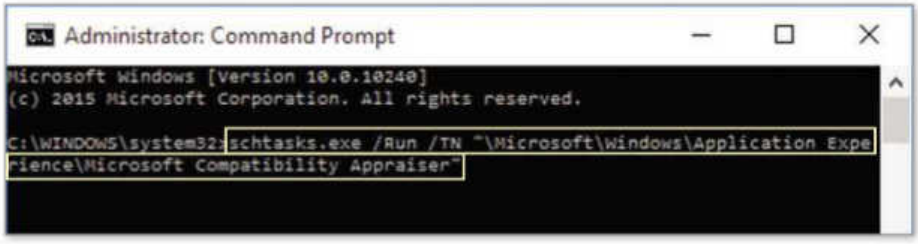
4. Why isn't my CPU supported?

Q I received the 'Get Windows 10' message, but after following the instructions I saw the message: "This PC cannot run Windows 10. The CPU is not supported". However, I am running Windows 7 and I ran the CPUID tool (www.snipca.com/17666) to confirm my PC's specifications, and it has a 2.50GHz Intel Celeron E3300 processor, which should mean it can run Windows 10. I've read online that this is a 'bug' within the Windows 10 download. Is this true?

Phil Varghese

A Yes, this was caused by a bug, though it was fixed with the Windows Update KB2952664 (www.snipca.com/17633). In Windows 7, click Start, type windows update and press Enter, then click 'Check for updates' (if your system isn't up to date) or 'View update history' to make sure KB2952664 is installed.

This will trigger the Compatibility Appraiser, which will run automatically within 24 hours. But if you don't want to wait, click Start, type cmd, then right-click 'cmd.exe' and choose 'Run as administrator'. Carefully type schtasks.exe /Run /TN "\Microsoft\Windows\Application Experience\Microsoft Compatibility Appraiser" (see screenshot), then press Enter. Wait a few minutes and you should be able to proceed with your Windows 10 upgrade from the Get Windows 10 app in your Taskbar.



Type this Command Prompt to run Microsoft's Compatibility Appraiser

5. Why can't I install MediaPortal?

Q I've installed Windows 10 and much prefer it to its predecessor Windows 8.1, but I wish Microsoft hadn't dropped Windows Media Center (WMC). I tried to install one of your suggested replacements, MediaPortal (www.team-mediaportal.com), and a message came up saying I need to have DirectX 9 installed. In Windows 10 DirectX 12 is installed – so why would MediaPortal need DirectX 9?

John David

A While we think MediaPortal is a great free replacement for WMC, its installer is flawed. The application requires a number of other software libraries to be installed – including DirectX 9. If you check MediaPortal's installation help pages (www.snipca.com/17641), you'll see it says 'DX9 is always necessary, even if a higher DirectX version (e.g. DX11) already exists on your system'. The same page has links to all the software you need, along with detailed installation instructions.

You will always need DirectX 9 on your PC to run MediaPortal

CHROME BROKEN

Not content with messing up your PC, Windows 10 updates are going after your browser too. As we were going to press, Chrome users started reporting that the first new build of Windows 10 since the operating system launched was crashing the 64bit version of the browser.

This build, called 10525, was rolled out to users who opted to get 'Insider' versions of Windows 10, as explained on Microsoft's blog: www.snipca.com/17717. This lets you try new features and fixes before they are released en masse to the public.

If you've not signed up to be a Windows Insider, you don't need to worry about this problem. But if you are an Insider, the best solution would be to install the 32bit version of Chrome (www.google.com/chrome/browser) instead. Find out what version you're using by clicking the three horizontal lines in Chrome (top right), then 'About Google Chrome' and check if anything is shown after the 'Version' number. You'll either see '64bit', or nothing – indicating 32bit.

6. What is this 'Critical error' problem that appears on my PC?

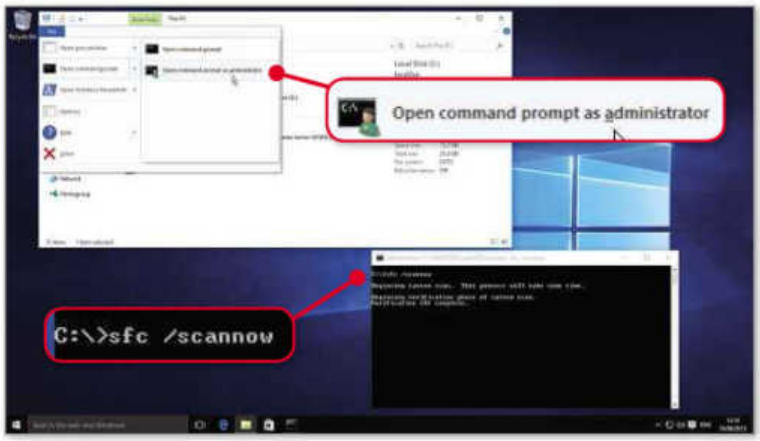
Q I upgraded from Windows 7 to Windows 10 and everything worked fine for a couple of days. Then, when I booted my PC I got the message: 'Critical Error Start menu and Cortana aren't working'. Nothing worked and I couldn't get into the computer. Is there a fix?

Laurence Rostron

A Many Windows 10 users have reported similar errors. It could be corrupt system files or it may just be an early bug that Microsoft will need to fix via Windows Update. There are a few solutions you can try, though the lack of a Start menu makes navigation awkward. First, double-click the Recycle Bin, click 'This PC' on the left, then click on your C: drive. Click File, 'Open command prompt', then 'Open command prompt as administrator'. At the command prompt, type sfc /scannow and press Enter. This will scan for (and fix) any corrupt system files. Wait for the scan to finish, then restart.

If that hasn't cured the problem, press Ctl+Alt+Del, then click the power icon (bottom right) – hold down the Shift key and click Restart, Troubleshoot, 'Advanced options', Start-up Settings, then Restart. The PC will boot to a screen of start-up options; press F5 for 'Enable Safe Mode with Networking' and log in as normal. The Start menu should work in Safe Mode, allowing you to try a few more fixes. If you use Avast Free Antivirus, for instance, try uninstalling the program and switching to Windows Defender – some users have found that this does the trick. Otherwise try creating a new local (ie, a non-Microsoft) user account, and temporarily switch to using this. Click Start, Settings, Accounts, 'Other users', then 'Add someone else' and follow the steps. Restart and log in as the new user.

If none of these solutions work, you could try a full Reset (click Start, Settings, Update & Security, Recovery, 'Get started', then 'Remove everything'). Be aware, though, this will completely wipe out all your personal files, settings and applications, requiring you to back up everything first. We recommend holding out for a fix from Microsoft before taking this route.

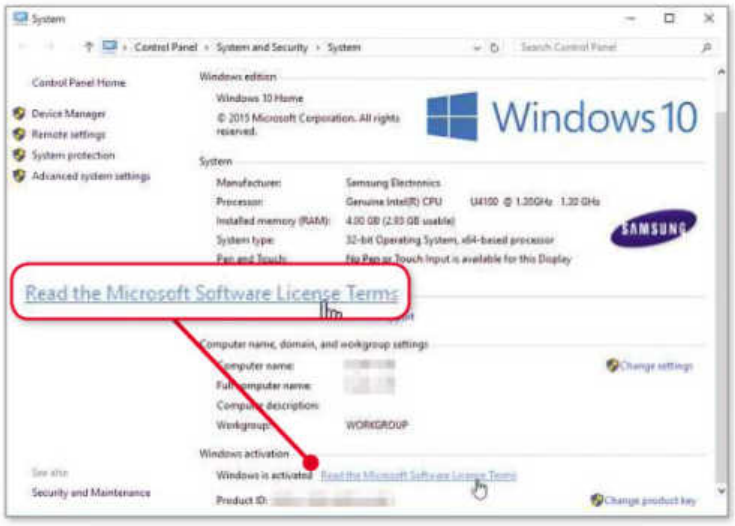


Try fixing 'critical' errors in Command Prompt

7. What happens to my Windows 7 licence?

Q I have built my own computer. If I understand the Windows 10 licence rules correctly, if or when my motherboard or SSD packs up, I will have to buy a fresh copy of the new operating system. If I have to do this and install my purchased copy of Windows 10, can I then install my old copy of Windows 7 on my XP laptop? Or is the Windows 7 product key transferred irrevocably to my free Windows 10 upgrade?

Graham Arnold



To see your licence, press Windows key+Pause/Break then click 'Read the Microsoft Software License terms'

A We could easily devote this whole feature to Microsoft's complex licensing terms, so before we answer your question, here's some background information on Windows licences.

For most home users the two relevant licence types are original-equipment manufacturer (OEM) and full-package product (FPP), also known as a retail purchase. OEM licences come with machines that have Windows pre-installed and are more restrictive than their FPP counterpart, but for your home-built PC you would have bought a retail version of Windows 7.

With Windows 8 Microsoft also introduced an 'OEM System Builder' licence with a 'Personal Use Licence' (PUL) element that means some Windows 8 home-builders will have only OEM licence rights, but this isn't relevant to you.

You have upgraded a retail (FPP) edition of Windows 7 to Windows 10, so the rights of your purchase are subsumed in your new licence. Point 15 of the Windows 7 licence for non-enterprise editions (ie, Home, Home Premium and Pro) states: "After you upgrade, you may no longer use the software you upgraded from". This means you can't go back to Windows 7, but point 4b of your new Windows 10 licence allows you to "transfer the software to another device that belongs to you".

That's the long answer! In a nutshell: your Windows 7 licence is no more, as you now instead have a Windows 10 licence that'll remain valid on any one device you own – including your current home-built PC if you change the motherboard or SSD or even your old XP laptop (if it's up to running Windows 10). To read your specific Windows 10 licence, press Windows key+Pause/Break then click 'Read the Microsoft Software License terms' (see screenshot above).

8. Why isn't my graphics card compatible with Windows 10?

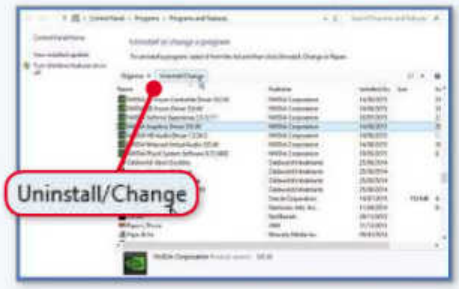
Q **I'm currently running Windows 7 Pro (64bit) and am eager to upgrade to Windows 10. I've been regularly clicking the Windows 10 Notification Area icon, and today I was disappointed to be told my PC won't support the upgrade because it contains an Nvidia 7050 display adapter. But that's not true – I upgraded my PC some time ago with an Nvidia GeForce 8400 GS PCI card. What can I do?**

Barry Smith

A We've had a lot of queries about compatible graphics and display drivers. In some cases, if your PC's display adapter is very old, the manufacturer may have stopped supporting it, meaning there'll be no official Windows 10 drivers available for it. You can check which display adapters are supported on the websites of Nvidia (www.snipca.com/17634), AMD (www.snipca.com/17635) and Intel (www.snipca.com/17636).

If yours isn't on the list, then you need to buy a new one. Consider the GeForce 210, which you should be able to find for less than £22 on Amazon (www.snipca.com/17640). It is relatively easy to install.

But what's perplexing is that Windows 10 *does* support your GeForce 8400 GS card. And yet the Windows 10 upgrade tool is mistakenly identifying it as an older, unsupported card. This could be because traces of older drivers are still hanging around somewhere in your system, so one solution would be to first download the latest driver from Nvidia (www.snipca.com/17638). Next, open the Control Panel, click 'Programs and Features', find the driver you want to uninstall, then click 'Uninstall/Change' (see screenshot below left). Then install the driver you've just downloaded.



Uninstall traces of old drivers in 'Programs and Features' via the Control Panel

Another option is to go ahead and upgrade to Windows 10 anyway (having backed up first), using the manual method outlined in our Workshop in Issue 456. In theory, Windows should simply install the correct driver itself during the upgrade, though it may install a generic display driver instead – to check, right-click Start and select Device Manager. The GeForce 8400 GS should be listed under 'Display adapters'. If it isn't, then download the Windows 10 driver from www.snipca.com/17638 and install it.

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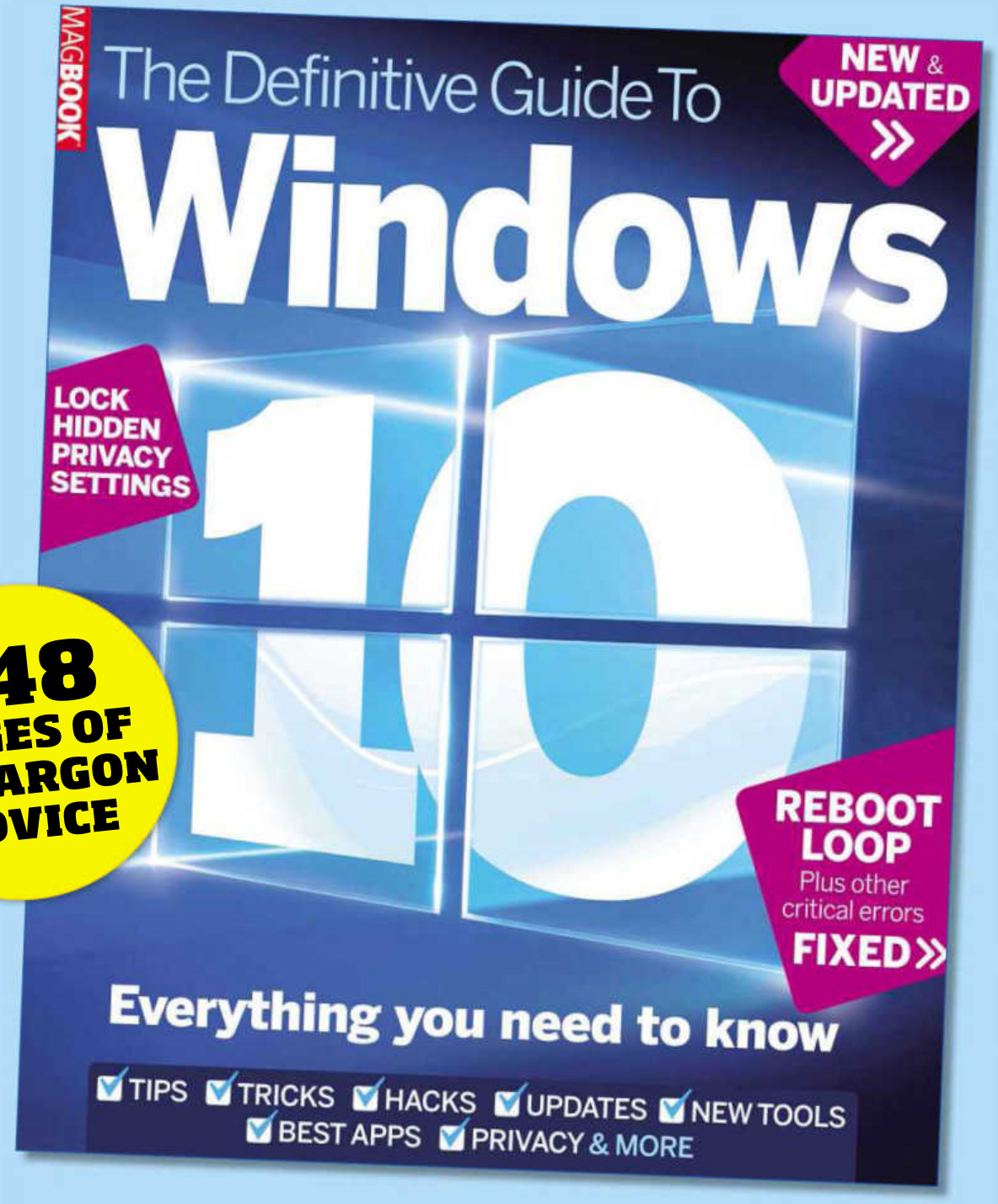
The Definitive Guide To Windows 10



Buy it now for £9.99 from www.snipca.com/17716

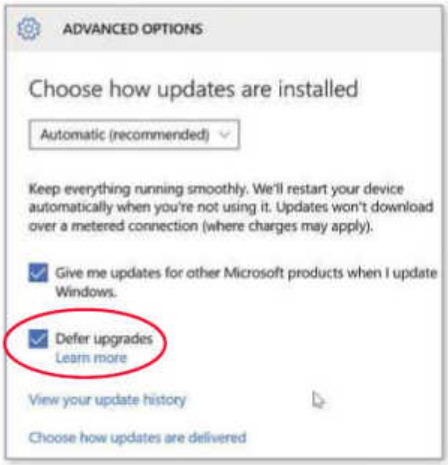
9. Where are all the usual system settings?

Q I have just installed Windows 10 Pro on my laptop which was previously happily running Windows 7 Ultimate. I've struggled to find some tools I like, such as 'Backup and Restore' and Windows Update. Also, I like to know what Microsoft is trying to install on my PCs, so I can let it download, but then decide when to install. This option is hard to find. Can you help?

Rod Theobald

A Let's start with the good news. Most of the system settings are still there, and you don't actually have to look that hard for them. Right-click on the Start button, select Control Panel, and you'll find that the good old Control Panel is still there, ready for duty. Microsoft doesn't really want you to use 'Backup and Restore' anymore because it thinks Windows 10's File History feature and the System Restore options are better.

However, if you disagree then you'll find 'Backup and Restore' in the Control Panel, under 'System and Security', along with a lot of the other system tools that Windows 10 has hidden away.



In Windows 10 Pro you have the option in your settings to postpone upgrades

Windows Update is a different story. Controversially, Microsoft will install updates whether you like it or not, but you can – to some degree – decide when they happen. In both the Home or Pro versions of Windows 10, click Start, Settings, Update & Security, then click Windows Update on the left-hand side. You'll see available updates listed, and an option to let Windows restart and install the update at a later time when it thinks you're not busy. But this only delays the update.

However, as a Pro user you also get the option to postpone updates until they've been tried and tested for a month or so. This doesn't give you control of exactly what updates install and when, but it should protect you if Microsoft releases a dodgy, poorly tested patch. To do this, click the 'Advanced options' link at the bottom of the page, then tick the 'Defer upgrades' option (see screenshot). It's one of the benefits Microsoft hopes will persuade users to pay for the Pro version.

Some Windows users regard Microsoft's policy on updates in Windows 10 dictatorial, and have accused Microsoft of exerting too much control. However previously many people failed to install updates, leaving their PC insecure – which is good news only for hackers. At least Microsoft is trying to keep its users safe. It just needs to make sure its updates install more smoothly than they have recently.

10. Why has my trusty printer stopped working?

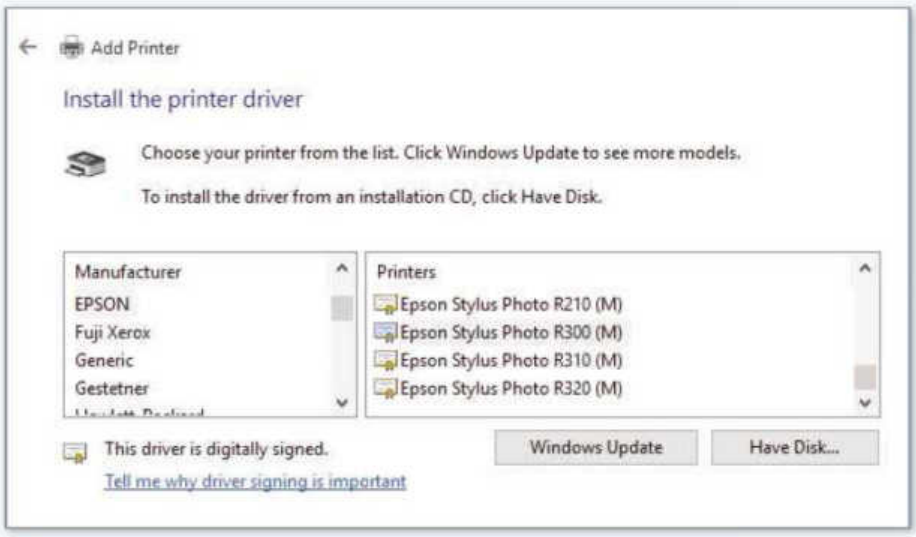
Q After installing Windows 10 my old and trusty Epson Stylus Photo R300 printer did not appear as a printer. Instead, a USB MFP (Hi Speed) was shown, with 'Driver Unavailable'. I tried a test print and it didn't work. According to the Epson site no drivers are required, because Windows 10 will find everything needed to install it. I can't find the printer's original software-installation disc, but I doubt this would solve the problem anyway. Is there a simple solution that escapes me?

Douglas Forrest

A One of Windows 10's more infuriating habits is to tell you that things will just work automatically, then give you no help at all when they don't. One way around this is to manually install the printer. Make sure it's powered on and connected to your PC, then right-click the Start button and select Control Panel. Now look under 'Hardware and Sound' and click 'View devices and printers'. Look in the bar at the top and you should see a link to 'Add a printer'.

Windows 10 will now search for your printer, but if it fails to come up with the Epson Stylus R300, click the link at the bottom for 'The printer that I want isn't listed'. There are two options here that might help. The first one is 'My printer is a little older. Help me find it'. Select that, click Next and wait while Windows 10 searches deeper.

If that doesn't work, click 'Add a local printer or network printer with manual settings' then click Next. Make sure 'Use an existing port' is selected, then click Next. Click the Windows Update button to force Windows to update its list of printers. Now select Epson under manufacturer and Epson Stylus Photo R300 (M) under the 'Printers' heading. Click Next and you should be up and running.

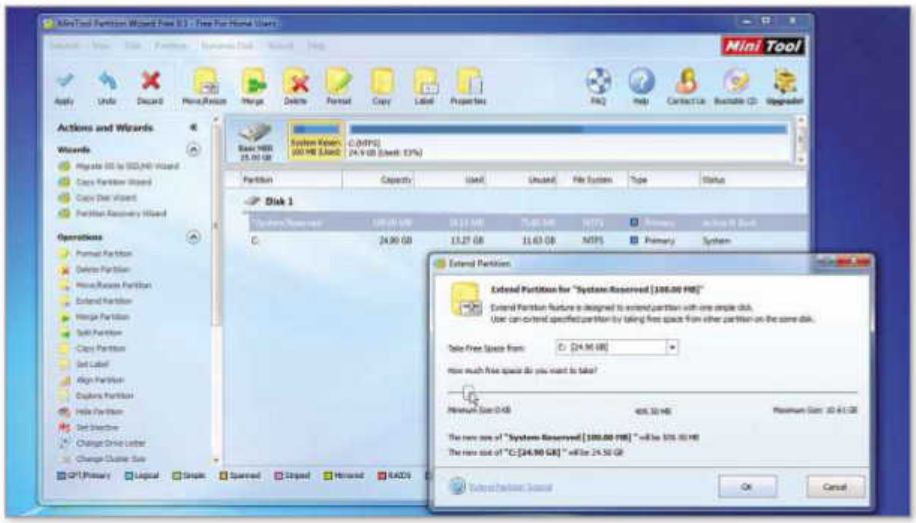


There are hidden options to add printers to Windows 10

11. Why is my reserve partition too small for Windows 10?

Q I have been trying to install Windows 10 on my Sony Vaio laptop for a week, but all I get is an error message telling me it can't install because of a problem with the System Reserved partition. I tried increasing my System Reserved partition size from 155MB to 500MB, but it made no difference. What should I do?

David Potter



Use the free program MiniTool Partition Wizard to increase your System Reserved partition

A First of all, you may want to wait a while before upgrading. Sony is advising all Vaio owners to wait until it releases compatible drivers and upgrade instructions before installing Windows 10. Windows 8.1 and 8 PCs are due to get these in October and November respectively, but at the time of writing, Sony hasn't announced when its Windows 7 computers will receive the same treatment – keep your eyes on Sony's support page at www.snipca.com/17708.

If you want to try upgrading despite this warning, make sure you do a full system image backup first. Next, click Start, right-click Computer and select Manage, then click Disk Management to see if there's more than one System Reserved partition. If so, try increasing the size of the other one(s). If you only have one System Reserved partition, you could try making this even bigger than 500MB. You don't mention which tool you used to resize your partitions, but MiniTool Partition Wizard Free (free from www.snipca.com/17642) is a good choice. Right-click the System Reserved partition and select Extend, then use the slider to select how much space to reallocate from your C: drive – try increasing the System Reserved partition to 1GB or even more.

12. Why did Windows 10 wipe my antivirus?

Q I installed Windows 10 with no problems, but then noticed some of my software was missing – including Kaspersky Internet Security 2015. I can only conclude that Windows 10 is so good that it does not need any other antivirus software, or am I missing something?

Thomas Czimmerl

Kaspersky has updated its security products to support Windows 10

A Like all new operating systems, Windows 10 will cause problems with some existing software. That's no consolation though when it wipes your antivirus, leaving you at risk of attack. If you want to stick with Kaspersky - and you should because it's won our past six antivirus tests – download the latest version from www.kaspersky.co.uk/product-updates, which supports Windows 10. What's more, the 2016 version of Internet Security, due for release in September, has tools especially built to keep Windows 10 safe.

It's also worth mentioning that it seems impossible to disable the built-in Windows Defender anti-malware program. You can temporarily turn it off by clicking Start, Settings, 'Update & Security' Windows Defender, but it soon turns itself back on. This isn't a huge problem because installing another antivirus product – and you should do this – automatically disables Windows Defender. It switches back on only if you uninstall the antivirus. ca

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PART 4

50 most useful Command Prompt commands

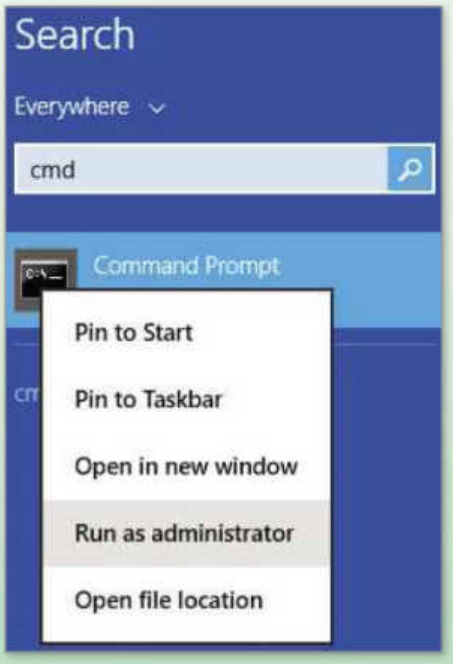
This issue, **Jane Hoskyn** reveals 10 ways to check, repair and format hard drives using your PC's oldest tool

31 Command as administrator

We'll kick off this section with an important tip: most hard drive-related commands will only work if you run the Command Prompt as administrator.

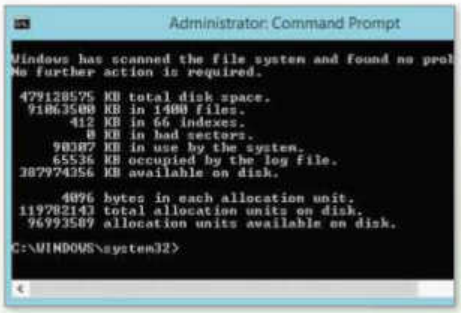
If you're not running as administrator, and you attempt a command such as 'chkdsk' (see below), Windows will chuck an inscrutable chunk of jargon at you: "Access Denied as you do not have sufficient privileges. You have to invoke this utility running in elevated mode".

In other words, close the Command Prompt and start again properly. Type cmd again into Start, and instead of pressing Enter, right-click Command Prompt in the list and click 'Run as administrator' (see screenshot below).



Run the Command Prompt as administrator for greater control over hard drives

The window will open as usual, but the prompt will be at a new location. Instead of the default **C:\Users\your name**, it'll be at **C:\WINDOWS\system32**, which gives you much deeper access to your system and drives.



Check the health of an internal or external drive using the 'chkdsk' command

32 Check your hard drive

In Command Prompt jargon, the 'chkdsk' (check disk) command analyses the 'integrity' of a 'volume'. In other words, it reveals basic information about the drive you're checking, including whether it's working as it should.

To check your main hard drive, run the Command Prompt as administrator, type chkdsk at the prompt and then press Enter. First, you'll be told what type of file system the drive uses; in most cases it will be NTFS.

Then you'll get swathes of information about your hard drive, including the customised name you've given it (if any), how many files it contains, how much space it takes up and – crucially – whether Windows has found any problems in it.

33 Check another drive

You can also use the chkdsk command to run the rule over your PC's other internal and external drives, including partitions, storage cards and USB sticks.

First, use Windows Explorer to find the assigned letter of the drive. A USB stick might be 'E:', for example. To check it's working properly, plug it into your PC (but don't open any files on it, or the command won't work); type chkdsk E: at the prompt, then press Enter.

34 Fix a drive error

If there seem to be errors in a drive, add the parameter '/f' to the command for a closer look. So type chkdsk /f E: and press Enter, and Windows will automatically look for errors in the drive and then apply any available fixes. This may help if, for example, you were having trouble accessing a storage card.

35 See every file in a drive

This time, the parameter is '/v'. Using our E: example, type chkdsk /v E: and press Enter to see the name of every file in every directory (folder) on the drive.

36 Run a quicker check

To speed things up when checking a huge drive, use the '/i' parameter (type chkdsk /i E:). This one only works with NTFS drives.

37 Find out all chkdsk parameters

Type chkdsk /? for the full list of parameters. You can also find a list, along with more info, in Microsoft's TechNet Library (www.snipca.com/17580).

38 Format a drive

First back up all important data, because formatting will erase the drive. Then run chkdsk to find out what type of system the drive is using (eg NTFS). Now type format E: /fs:ntfs (we're using E: as an example again), press Enter, and then press Y to format.

39 Check hard drive at startup

You can set and stop chkdsk running automatically at Windows startup, using a Registry hack. Create a system restore point first, and find full instructions here: www.snipca.com/17582.

40 Copy floppies

Do you still use floppy disks? Lucky you, because the command 'diskcopy' lets you instantly copy everything from one disk to another. Type diskcopy A: B: (using A: and B: as example disks) then press Enter. ca

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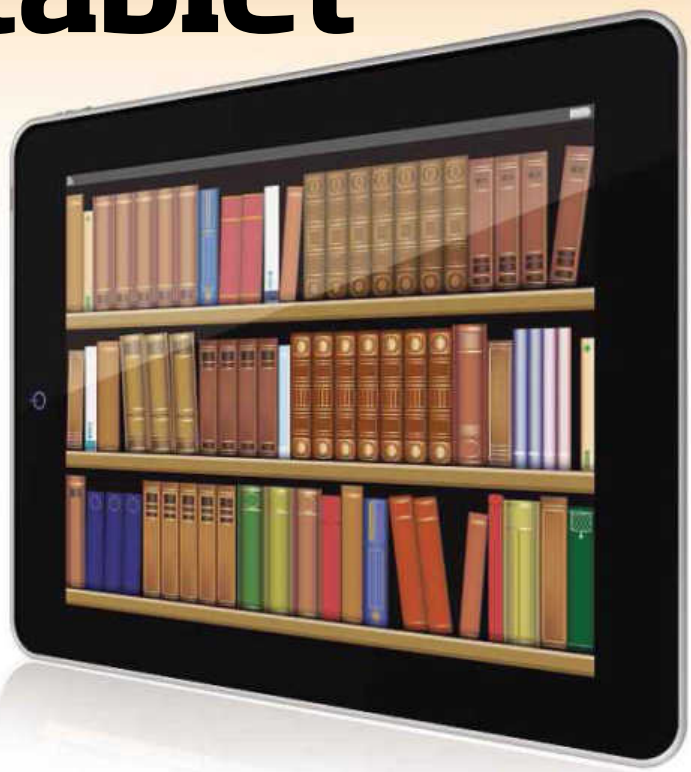


If you've read the news lately, you'd be forgiven for wondering what rights – if any – you have over the digital media you buy.

In October 2014, UK citizens were finally allowed to copy their MP3s, CDs, DVDs and ebooks – but just eight months later in June 2015, the law was rolled back. Now we're not even sure if we can rip a CD for iTunes.

Amazon may seem restrictive with its proprietary formats, but its range of apps makes it easy to read ebooks legally on almost any tablet, phone or PC.

Read Kindle ebooks on your tablet

First, let's examine one key reason why you may want to read ebooks on your tablet: the quality of illustrations. Simple drawings, tables and charts look much better on a tablet screen than on a Kindle, while intricately drawn comics don't work on the latter at all. Take the Asterix comic books, which we loved when young and still dip into now. The Kindle's E-Ink can't display these, but they look great on an iPad or Android tablet (see screenshot right).

Amazon wants us to look at these pictures, which is part of the reason why it offers a Kindle app for Android (www.snipca.com/17677), iOS (www.snipca.com/17678) and Windows Phone (www.snipca.com/17739 - Windows 10 required). All these apps support Kindle-format ebooks, whether they have illustrations or not.

Comic books such as Asterix can't even be opened on a standard E-ink Kindle, but they look stunning on the Kindle app for iPad

You can also read online using the Kindle Cloud Reader (https://read.amazon.com; free account required) and by downloading the free 'Kindle for PC' program (www.amazon.co.uk/kindleforpc). Most of these apps (iOS aside) let you carry on reading where you left off, look up words, read excerpts before you buy, and read newspapers and magazines.

Download Amazon's 'Kindle for PC' program to read and sync ebooks on your computer

Beat Apple's unfair restrictions

While the Android version of the Kindle app lets you buy ebooks from Amazon, Apple won't allow you to do the same thing. You can search for Kindle ebooks and add them to your iOS wishlist, but you can't actually buy them.

The solution is to use Apple's Safari browser (www.apple.com/uk/safari), which is pre-installed in iOS. Go to Amazon's UK website (www.amazon.co.uk) using Safari, log in, find the book you want, select it for delivery to your iPad and buy it using 1-Click payment, which is the default. Now go back to the Kindle app, and your book should be waiting for you.

If it hasn't downloaded automatically, first make sure you're connected to the internet, then at the bottom of the screen tap the tab marked Cloud and re-sync your library. The book should appear, ready for you to download and read.

Sync ebooks between devices

One of the best things about the Kindle is that it lets you sync your progress through a book on all your devices. You could finish reading your Kindle in bed at night, then

Kindle apps should sync automatically, but you can force-sync them manually with the press of a button

EBOOKS, DRM AND THE LAW

There's an ongoing legal debate about what we should be allowed to do with the digital books, videos and music we buy.

Some publishers don't use DRM on their ebooks, letting you convert them to read on multiple devices. To do this, you'll still need some third-party software. The gold standard is Calibre (www.calibre-ebook.com), which is open-source, and therefore should always be free. It also lets you transfer your ebooks to a range of e-readers in different formats.

Amazon supports AZW and MOBI formats, while most other readers use ASCM and EPUB. Almost all e-readers support PDF, but ebooks are hard to read in this format.

Even when British law allowed you to copy your ebooks, DRM removal was still a grey area legally due to a lack of test cases. However, the popularity of DRM-removing plug-ins for Calibre surged (such as Apprentice Alf's DeDRM Tools: www.snipca.com/17690).

Elsewhere in the EU, users have more rights, with most countries allowing personal backups. Some, such as France, even ban manufacturers using DRM to force users to use certain hardware (Kindles, for example).

pick up from where you left off on your tablet by the sofa the next day, or on your phone while you're waiting for the bus.

You can even sync ebooks you've imported from elsewhere. To give this a try, we bought a collection from Humble Bundle (www.humblebundle.com/books), an independent online store that sells 'bundles' of ebooks. After we emailed them to our Kindle app, they were automatically added to our Kindle library, ready to download and sync.

However, before you do likewise, bear in mind that syncing Kindle ebooks can only be done from an email address that you've authorised. To add an approved email address, visit Amazon's 'Manage Your Content and Devices' page (www.snipca.com/17682), sign in if prompted, then click Settings.

If your ebooks won't automatically sync, you may need to do so manually. To do this, make sure your devices are connected to the internet via either Wi-Fi or mobile data (usually 3G/4G). Next, tap the centre of the reading screen to bring up the menu icons, tap the icon with three horizontal lines, then tap 'Sync'. Do this before you start reading, and after you finish.

The magic of the spoken word

Amazon has a clever service called 'Whispersync for Voice' (www.snipca.com/17683) that lets you sync audiobooks with ebooks. This means that an audiobook picks up where you stopped reading on an ebook. You will need to sign up for an account with Audible, though, which is owned by Amazon. There's a one-month free trial (three months if you're a Prime subscriber), which you can sign up to at www.snipca.com/ 17684. After that it's £7.99 for one book a month, or £14.99 for two books a month.

Use your Amazon account to log in when you sign up for Audible. You'll get a free audiobook and can then cancel your subscription – your account will remain active, but you won't be charged and your audiobook will still be yours.

Now, when you browse Amazon's 30,000 'Whispersync for Voice' ebooks (www.snipca.com/17724, see screenshot below), you'll be given the option of buying a companion audiobook. There are some real bargains here, with prices reduced by as much as £20.

Amazon lets you browse the books available with 'Whispersync for Voice'

More than just Amazon

When you think 'ebooks', you may automatically think 'Kindle', but there's far more choice. Sony, Bookeen and Kobo, along with the ebook stores run by WH Smith (www.whsmith.co.uk/ebooks) and Foyles (www.foyles.co.uk/eBooks), all use the free and open EPUB format, protected by DRM (digital rights management) provided by Adobe Digital Editions (ADE, www.snipca.com/17686).

WH Smith sells ebooks in the open EPUB format

Now for the bad news. ADE is harder to use than Amazon's, mainly because syncing is tricky. You have to make sure your purchases from different retailers are all linked to the same account. However, it does at least give you the chance to shop at multiple retailers, rather than being forced to use just Amazon.

You can read any ADE EPUB ebook on your tablet using Adobe's own Digital Editions app for iOS (www.snipca.com/17688). But much better is MobiSystems' Universal Book Reader app for Android (www.snipca.com/17689). If your ebooks are DRM-free and, like us, you prefer Amazon's interface and syncing features, then you can use Calibre (see box above) to convert them to MOBI format and email them to your Kindle app. ca

Has Your Email Been HACKED?

Recent high-profile attacks have again exposed how much hackers love reading your emails. **Daniel Booth** explains how to find out if you've been a victim

You know a hacking story is big when the BBC leads with it on its news bulletins. That's what happened on Saturday 8 August when Carphone Warehouse said hackers had accessed the details of 2.4 million customers. Ouch. We know a huge hack when we see it – and so did Huw Edwards.

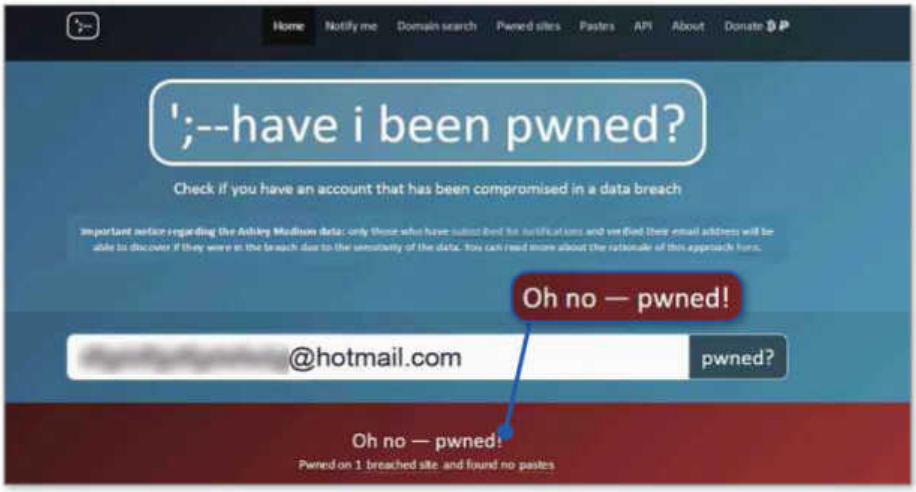
To its credit, Carphone Warehouse wasn't slow to admit the hack, and promptly emailed those affected, telling them they should notify their bank and check for any suspicious activity on their account. But other companies have been less responsible when responding to hacks, sometimes hushing it up, or taking months to admit it happened.

This shameful behaviour makes it hard for you to find out if you've been a victim. In cases when your email address has been stolen, you would have been using it for months oblivious to the fact that somewhere, probably in Russia or China, a hacker would also have had access to it. That's a chilling thought.

Find out if you've been hacked

Thankfully, there are ways of checking whether your email has been hacked. The quickest method is to enter your email address into the search box at the website 'Have I been pwned?' (HIBP?, https://haveibeenpwned.com). It will then check that email against the published databases of hacks over the past couple of years. If it finds a match, it tells you in which hack your email was nicked.

As you can see in the screenshot above right, we were unlucky. An old Hotmail email account of ours was accessed by hackers in the massive attack on Adobe's customer database in October 2013. Around 153 million accounts were breached, including, it seems, one of ours. Fortunately, we hadn't used that Hotmail account for about five years, and we used a unique password for it. Hackers would have been able to read some old email newsletters we once subscribed to, but that's about it.



Oh no! We discovered that an old Hotmail address had been 'pwned'

On the other hand, maybe we were *lucky*, because none of our other email accounts had been accessed. In total the website checks over 220 million hacked accounts, so it's quite a relief that only one belonged to us. Still, we wasted no time deleting that Hotmail account by following Microsoft's instructions at www.snipca.com/17738.

Other hacks over the past few years checked by HIBP? include attacks on Yahoo, Sony, Vodafone, Tesco and Snapchat. Visit the site now if you have an account with any of these companies – and even if you don't you should bookmark HIBP?, and return to it after every major hack. We predict you'll be using it several more times before the year is out.

To receive an email notification when you've been hacked, click the 'Notify me when I get pwned' link.

'Pwned' explained

As well as messing up PCs, hackers love to wreck the English language. To be 'pwned' means to be 'owned' – and to be 'owned' means to have been the victim of an attack. So if you've been 'pwned', hackers now 'own' your email account. It's a suitably nasty way to describe a nasty activity.

What about the Ashley Madison hack?

Well, we didn't want to bring this up, considering its delicate nature. But we can't ignore it. This hack has become the most notorious of the year - possibly ever.

If you've not heard of Ashley Madison (www.ashleymadison.com), then good for you. It's a 'dating' site that encourages people to cheat on their partners (its slogan: 'Life is short. Have an affair'). It claims to have nearly 40 million "anonymous" members worldwide - except they're not so anonymous any more after hackers published online the details of millions of members.

Legal action by Ashley Madison forced offline sites that tell you if you've been hacked

The leak appeared to show that 124 UK civil servants, 92 Ministry of Defence staff and 50 police officers are members of the site, as is Michelle Thomson, a newly elected SNP MP. However, she said a hacker had signed into the site using an old email address, and that she had never visited the site.

Thomson's case highlights the threat of identity theft, and Ashley Madison's poor security - at one stage the site didn't even verify email addresses for new user accounts, allowing people to create fake accounts. It's possible that hackers have created an Ashley Madison account using your stolen email address, although they are more likely to have targeted celebrities, or people in a position of power. Criminals can make big bucks blackmailing those with a reputation to lose.

The hack left Troy Hunt, who runs HIBP?, with a dilemma. If he allowed people to search for emails stolen in the hack, they would see names of others who were Ashley Madison members. Rightly, Hunt has decided to not permit this. Instead, he will email users if they've been hacked, explaining his reasons in a blog post (www.snipca.com/17734): "There's no escaping the human impact of it. The discovery of one's spouse in the data could have serious consequences".

Other sites want to tell you if you've been hacked, but Ashley Madison isn't keen. Its legal department forced CheckAshleyMadison (http://checkashleymadison.com) to go offline. It's worth visiting the site to read the owner's reaction to this heavy-handed response (see screenshot above).

Another way to check whether your email has been hacked is on Pastebin, which is a site for storing text for a certain period. Lists of stolen emails often appear on Pastebin's Trends page (http://pastebin.com/trends). We weren't surprised to see a list from the Ashley Madison hack, nor that it had been opened over 93,000 times in just two days. It's worth clicking the red 'last 365 days' link at the top of the page (see screenshot below). This will show you the most popular posts from the past 12 months, many of which will be lists of hacked accounts.

Who's behind the hacks?

So, who are the hackers causing such misery and mayhem? Well, we know who's claiming responsibility for the Ashley Madison attack: a group called the Impact Team. But apart from their rather naff name, little is known about the hackers, except that it appears they formed solely to carry out the attack because there's no evidence they existed before.

Ashley Madison suspects an inside job. Chief executive Noel Bidderman said: "It was definitely a person here that was not an employee, but certainly had touched our technical services".

No group has claimed responsibility for the Adobe hack in 2013, though security researchers investigating it say the hackers spoke Russian. They will have been part of a criminal organisation, not ideologically motivated 'hacktivists'. They wanted to make lots of money, not a statement about world inequality.

Email addresses stolen in the Ashley Madison hack appeared on Pastebin

In fact, most of the major hacks of the past few years remain unsolved. Nobody knows, for example, who stole the details of 233 million eBay users in 2014. The perpetrators were probably part of a shadowy criminal gang with nothing to gain from being exposed. Unlike the Isis-supporting hackers that grafitti websites and the infamous Anonymous group (read their exploits at www.snipca.com/17740), they're not seeking publicity.

But the default reaction of security experts after most hacks is to look towards Russia, especially if the attacks seem politically motivated. In 2015 alone Russian gangs, possibly backed by the Kremlin, have been accused of hacking the White House (reading President Obama's emails), the Pentagon, the German parliament and French TV stations.

It's even thought that one group of Russian hackers targeted the country's own Defence Ministry to highlight its shoddy security (www.snipca.com/17741).

Unless you're planning a surprise bid for the US Presidency, you won't be targeted by these state-sponsored hackers. You've got more to worry about from cyber-gangsters eyeing up your email address and personal info in order to steal your identity. With this information, they will try to commit fraud in your name. Thwart them by checking HIBP? and Pastebin as soon as you read about a substantial hack. ca

Recover Your Email

All the major webmail services have clear instructions on rescuing your account following a hack, as do ISPs that provide email. Here's where you need to go should the worst happens:

AOL http://mail.security.aol.com

BT www.bt.com/help/home/email.html

Gmail www.snipca.com/17727

Outlook (or Hotmail) www.snipca.com/17726

Sky www.snipca.com/17731

TalkTalk www.snipca.com/17736

Virgin Media www.snipca.com/17730

Yahoo www.snipca.com/17728

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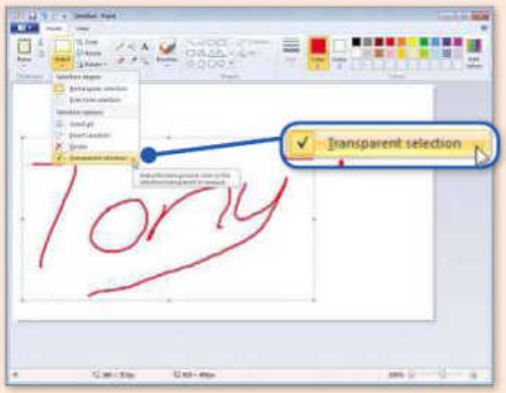
Problems Solved

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

How do I add captions or signatures to my photos?

Q **Is there a method of inserting text or a signature to my photos? If so, could you explain using simple language, please?**

Tony Doherty



Use Windows' Microsoft Paint tool to add signatures and captions to your photos

A We're not sure what operating system you use, but you can achieve both of these things with Microsoft Paint, which is included with all consumer versions of Windows.

First, launch Paint. In Windows 7 and earlier, click Start followed by All Programs then Accessories, followed by Paint. In Window 8.1, type paint in the Start screen then click Paint. Next, open a photo using the File menu (the blue down arrow).

Adding text is very easy. Click the Text icon (the capital letter A on the Home tab), then choose a colour by clicking Color 1 followed by the desired colour swatch. Click on your photo approximately where you want the text – this opens a text box and enables the Text tab. In the Font section of the Text tab, choose the font style and size, and make sure the Transparent option is on (just click to highlight it). Now type your text. If it's not in quite the right place, move your mouse cursor over the text frame's top or bottom until it changes to a crosshair, then just click and drag the text frame to a new position.

Adding a signature is trickier but still possible, even with Paint's rudimentary tools. First, press Control (Ctrl)+N to create a new canvas. On the Home tab, set Color 1 to the colour you want for your signature then, in the Tools section, click the Pencil tool. If you want a thicker stroke, choose one from the Size dropdown menu. Now simply click to write your signature. If you make a mistake with a particular stroke, press Ctrl+Z to undo it and try again. Don't worry about the size of the signature for now, because we'll explain to you later how to resize it when adding it to a photo.

When you're happy, click Select in the Image section, then choose 'Rectangular selection'. Now click Select again and this time tick 'Transparent selection' (see screenshot). Next, click and drag to draw a selection rectangle that encapsulates your whole signature. Then, right-click inside the selection frame and choose Copy. Assuming you want to use the signature in future, save it via 'Save as' on the File menu. It's important to save it using the bitmap format ('BMP picture'), as all the other formats use compression that, while fine for high-resolution photos, would cause ugly effects when pasting your signature in future.

Finally, open a second window of Paint (just repeat our earlier instructions) and in this open a photo. Now just click the Paste button (or press Ctrl+V) to paste your signature at the top left. To move it, hover the cursor in the middle until it changes to a crosshair then click and drag. Finally, resize it by clicking and dragging one of the corner handles. Save the photo.

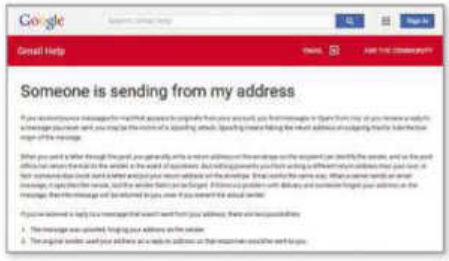
How did my PC send emails when it was switched off?

Q **My email account has sent emails to lots of people in my address book, apparently at 9:36pm, but the computer was switched off at that time. My Norton Internet Security software is up to date. I change the password regularly and it contains a mix of numbers, characters and upper-/lower-case letters. How can emails be sent from my PC when it's switched off? What do I need to do to stop it?**

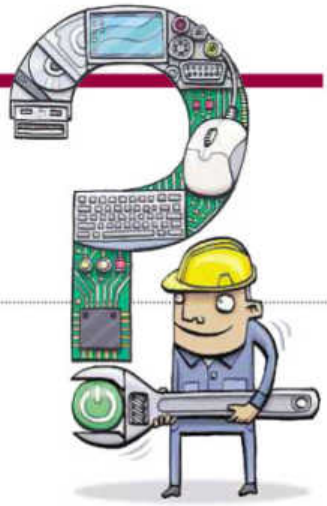
David Sherwood

A Sadly, there's probably nothing you can do about it because it sounds like someone is spoofing your email address, which anyone can do – there's no need for them to have access to your PC, or even your email account. They do this both for appearances (a spam email from 'you' might convince someone else that it's legitimate) and to circumvent spam filters, because made-up addresses might be blacklisted. Google has some information on spoofing at www.snipca.com/17438 which applies to any type of email account – not just Gmail.

One concern is that you say the emails were sent to a lot of people in the account's address book. That could indicate that the perpetrator has accessed your account in the past, but as you change the password regularly that's unlikely and won't be a problem in future. But more likely is that it's a coincidence: perhaps you and your contacts are all members of a mailing list that the perpetrator has obtained for his nefarious purposes.



Get advice from Google's Gmail Help page if someone is spoofing your email address



Our experts solve all your tech problems

Email us your problem and we'll try to help: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

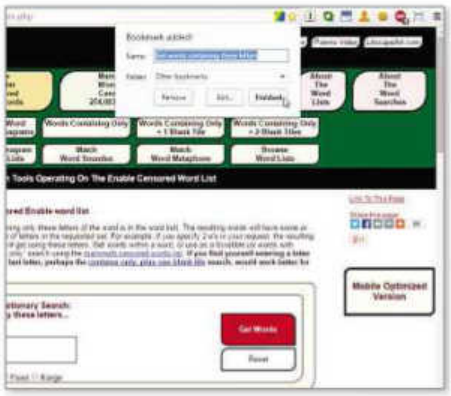
Why do I get a '403 forbidden' error?

Q For months I have been using Litscape.com's wordsearch pages without any problems. But now I see a '403 Forbidden' error message whenever I visit, which insists that I do not have permission to access a particular site on this server. I do not understand the message as I haven't changed from using Google Chrome. To the best of my knowledge, Litscape.com site is free and does not impose limits on the number of searches made. Perhaps I have inadvertently changed something in my antivirus (AV) settings?

Alan Ingrey

A We don't think this has anything to do with your AV software. Instead, we think you've bookmarked a particular sub-page of the Litscape.com website. For whatever reason, that page has been made directly inaccessible by Listscape.com's developer.

While this is sometimes because the website publisher wants to force visitors to dig down to particular web pages using only clickable links (perhaps to increase exposure to adverts), having looked at Litscape.com in this case we think it's much more likely that your bookmark has simply become outdated. This means Litscape.com has probably changed its website structure so that category addresses are no longer directly accessible.



If you see the '403' error message on a favourite site, try replacing the bookmark you use to access it

For example, starting at Litscape.com you can manually go to any category by clicking. Equally, you can directly access (by typing or using a bookmark) the Word Tools category at www.litscape.com/word_tools. But if you try to directly access the Mammoth Word List page by typing (or going via a bookmark to) www.litscape.com/word_tools_mammoth_censored, you'll see the '403 Forbidden' error.

We reckon this is nothing more than untidy programming on Litscape.com's part, but the bottom line is your existing bookmark has been rendered unusable. The solution is to either start at the top (by visiting www.litscape.com) and find the tool that you want, or remake the bookmark to the updated page.

We're sure you'll want to do the latter, so first remove your existing bookmark. In Chrome, press Control(Ctrl)+Shift+O to open the Bookmarks Manager, then click to highlight the outdated bookmark and press Delete (Del) to remove it. To add the new bookmark, drill down manually through Litscape.com's menu as explained then press Ctrl+D, type a name and select a folder from the dropdown menu, then click Finished.

How do I move the My Documents folder?

Q I followed *Computeractive*'s instructions recently to make a new partition, so I now have an empty partition (drive G). However, all my documents, pictures and videos are still cluttering drive C. Please could you tell me how I can move them from drive C to drive G? Also, is it possible to change the default save location for new documents so that they end up on drive G?

Tom Pawson

A Yes, you can do both of these things – and quite easily.

You didn't tell us which version of Windows you use but it's pretty much the same process in all recent versions. First, press Windows key+E to launch Windows Explorer (or File Explorer in Windows 8.1/10) then navigate to the user folder that contains your existing My Documents (or Documents) folder. Typically, the path will be **C:\Users\YourUserName**.

Once there, right-click My Documents and choose Properties. Now select the Location tab, click the Move button and select a new location (the G drive, in your case). Click OK, read the warning message and then click Yes to confirm.

Move folders and files to a new partition by clicking the Move button in Properties

This will also cause all programs that use the default Windows save location (My Documents/Documents) to redirect their content to this location. For programs that don't, you'll need to manually direct their Save dialogue boxes to your chosen location on the G drive.

Problems Solved

Why can't I download 4K YouTube videos?

Q My friend recently bought a 4K Ultra HD TV. There aren't many 4K TV programmes yet but I have used Freemake to download videos from YouTube and turn them into MP4 videos, so I thought I'd try a similar thing with the new collections of test 4K videos from YouTube. However, it failed. I searched Freemake support and it said YouTube has stopped providing links to these videos (see screenshot), so the download feature no longer works. I am puzzled. Surely it's possible to get a 4K test video? I know you don't recommend Freemake because of all the extra PUPs but I'm careful and therefore don't have a problem with it.

John G Byrne

A You have one problem that masks another. From your screenshot we know that you read the summary of a support article published in 2013, which explained that a change made by YouTube had hobbled a particular feature of Freemake.

The article goes on to explain that an update had announced the hiccup had been fixed in the latest version of Freemake. So, with our usual caveats about Freemake's PUP, the solution to your second problem – the inability to download 4K videos from YouTube – is to update your version of the program.

Update Freemake to the latest version to download 4K videos from YouTube

Do I have a rootkit infection?

Q I have a Windows 8.1 computer with Norton Internet Security and Norton Power Eraser (NPE). On running NPE it found an item named 'cdmsnroot_s.sys', which it marked as 'bad'. I then ran three scans with Malwarebytes, which didn't identify a problem – indicating that the computer was clean. The computer runs perfectly with no problems. Do you think that this is a rootkit infection or a false positive?

Norton Power Eraser employs aggressive methods that may throw up false positives

Tony Rooker

A We can't absolutely rule out an infection but on the evidence supplied it seems unlikely. By its own admission NPE uses "aggressive methods to detect threats" and goes on to state that there's a risk it'll mark some "legitimate programs for removal".

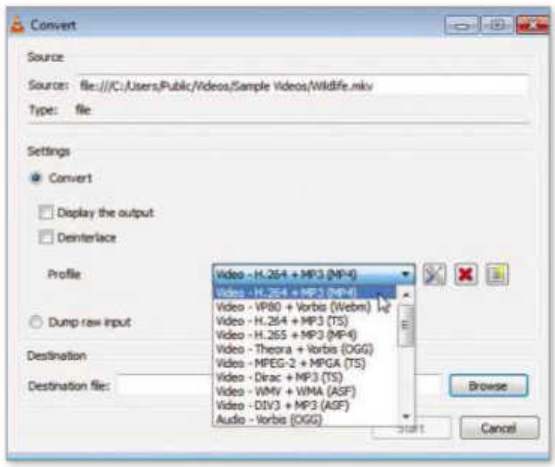
We can't find any firm details on the file you specified but it's possibly a driver for some old piece of software or hardware. Likewise, we don't know why NPE marked it as 'bad' but the fact that the file name contains 'root' might have set off the program's "aggressive" instincts. When we tried NPE, it also marked Pidgin and Adblock Plus as 'unwanted programs', which they're certainly not, and a legitimate OneDrive update as 'bad'.

Malwarebytes has given your PC a clean bill of health, so we wouldn't be too concerned. But we'd suggest firing up File Explorer to search for and find the location of cdmsnroot_s.sys, and then see if the name of the containing folder serves up any more clues about its origin.

How do I convert MKV files?

Q I've got a load of MKV video files on a USB stick. These play on my computer (using VLC) but not on my TV, even though the TV plays most other video files I've tried, such as MP4 files downloaded from the internet. Is there a way to get my TV to play MKV files? Or is there a program I can use on my PC to convert them to MP4?

Gareth Hughes



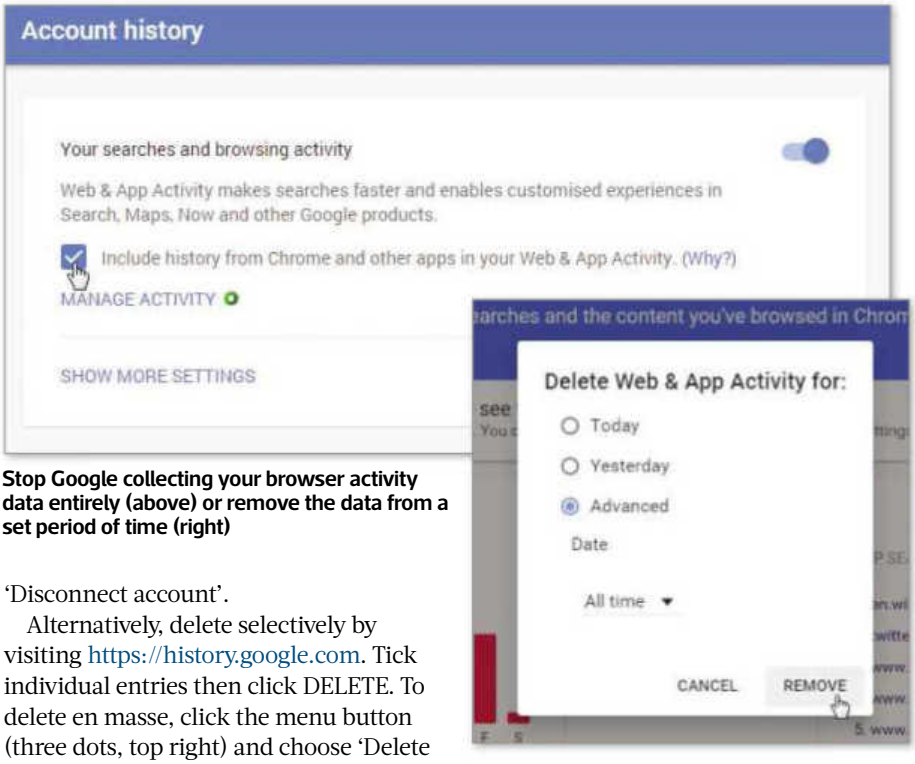
Use media player VLC to convert video files to any number of different formats

A Yes, and you already have it installed – VLC. Open the Media menu and click Convert/Save. Now select the File tab, click Add, select an MKV file (or several by holding down Control and clicking each in turn) then click Open. Click the Convert/Save button then choose the desired output format from the Profile menu. Finally, type a name in the 'Destination file' field (and click Browse if you want to change the save location), then click Start. Now wait – it could take minutes or hours to convert your videos, depending on their size.

How do I stop Google revealing which pages I've visited?

Q I use the Chrome browser, with Google as my search engine. I'm happy with both, but one aspect of Google makes me uncomfortable, privacy-wise. Whenever I search for something, on some results Google adds the message "You have visited this page 5 times" or similar. Not that I visit anything particularly contentious online, but I'm a member of a local club and I sometimes let others use my laptop – and I'd rather Google didn't show them where I've been when they carry out their own searches. How do I stop this, or at least delete some of the more sensitive visits?

Lance Edwards



Stop Google collecting your browser activity data entirely (above) or remove the data from a set period of time (right)

A This happens because you're logged into Google with Chrome, and because Google loves to collect personal information. You can either log out, stay logged in and delete collected information selectively, or disable its collection entirely.

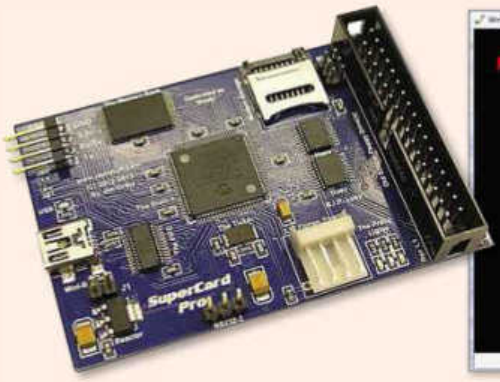
To log out, click Chrome's menu button (three horizontal lines at the top right) then Settings. Now click the 'Disconnect your Google Account' button followed by 'Disconnect account'.

Alternatively, delete selectively by visiting https://history.google.com. Tick individual entries then click DELETE. To delete en masse, click the menu button (three dots, top right) and choose 'Delete options' – you can now choose a period of time to delete. Or, to stop Google doing this entirely, click the menu, choose Settings, clear the 'Include history from Chrome and other apps in your Web & App Activity' box then click PAUSE.

How do I read my old Amiga floppy disks?

Q My old Amiga 1500 computer has sadly stopped working. I have a number of spreadsheets on floppy disks that I would like to access. I am using a Windows 7 PC. Is there an emulator that would allow me to do this?

John Pryor



Use this SuperCard adapter to attach an Amiga floppy disk to a modern PC, or...

...install a virtual Amiga inside WinUAE

A There are several Amiga emulators, with the most popular being WinUAE (free from www.winuae.net). However, while it's easy to emulate AmigaOS (the Amiga operating system), reading old disks is a different matter. The Amiga's 3.5in disks are physically identical to PC ones but data is stored on them in an entirely different way. A PC floppy drive just can't read Amiga disks.

There are workarounds involving special hardware adapters, but none is particularly easy to configure, and there's the small matter of cost: the SuperCard adapter that enables a salvaged Amiga floppy disk to be attached to a PC costs US$99.95 (around £64) plus US$15.20 (£10) shipping, from www.snipca.com/17074.

If you're not prepared or able to go to this hassle and expense, some Amiga enthusiasts offer disk-conversion services. For example, Amiga Forever will transfer Amiga Floppy disks to PC ones for €5 (around £3.50) a go – www.snipca.com/17075.

But being able to read the old disks on your Windows PC solves only half your problem. You didn't tell us which spreadsheet you used on the Amiga, but the chances are slim that any modern PC application would be able to interpret its files. A solution would be to install your Amiga spreadsheet program inside a virtual Amiga inside WinUAE. Next, open your spreadsheets and save them as Lotus 123 files, as this will let you open them in pretty much any PC spreadsheet.

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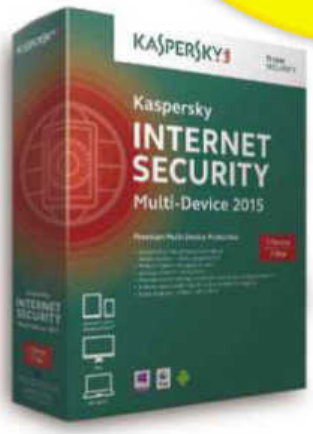

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Am I damaging my hard drive by keeping it on?

Q **I back up to an external hard drive. This means that the drive is actively accessed for just a minute or two every few days, but I keep the drive connected at all times rather than for the short duration of the backups. Will this shorten the life of the drive?**

Myer Green

A Hard drives are mechanical devices, so they have various moving parts – principally a stack of magnetic platters that rotate at very high speed, and a matching stack of tiny read/write heads. As with any mechanical device, wear and tear will reduce the lifespan of your drive. It's impossible to say how much in practical terms but the short answer to your question is yes: your drive's life will be shortened a bit by leaving it connected and switched on.

Windows does include options to 'spin down' hard drives after a set period of idleness, to mitigate wear and tear. Launch Control Panel, then click 'System and Security' followed by Power Options, then 'Change plan settings' and 'Change advanced power settings'. Now click to expand the 'Hard disk' section and choose the period before idle drives are spun down (on both mains power and battery, if you've got a laptop). Click OK.

Make your external hard drive power down when idle by tweaking your Power Options in the Control Panel

However, be aware that even with this option set your external drive will still regularly 'spin up' – when Windows performs background maintenance and indexing tasks, for example, or should you click the drive in Windows Explorer. So, the very simplest solution for your circumstances is to perform your backup and then switch off the drive, or disconnect its power supply. This will also save you a tiny amount of electricity.

We're certain some readers will email us to say this strategy will itself cause wear and tear when the drive is next powered – and that's true. But it will be less overall than leaving a barely used drive powered all the time.

Can I make my iPad talk to me?

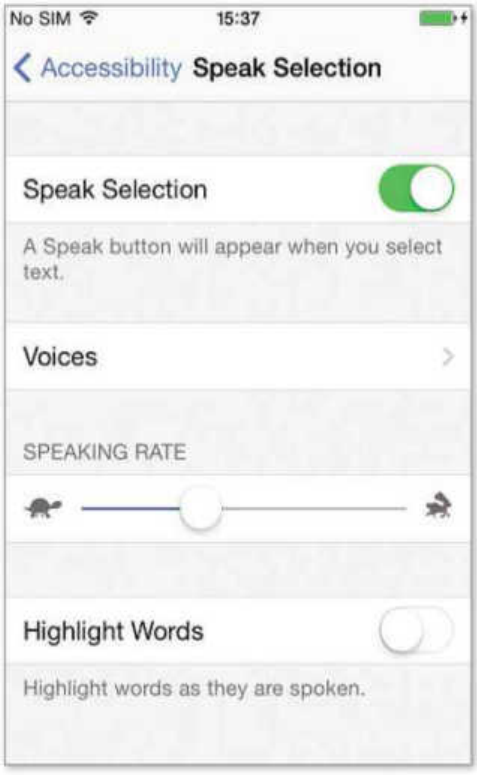
Q **A while back you ran a feature on making a PC talk to you (page 58, Issue 449). This was of considerable interest to me, being partially sighted. In particular I liked Balabolka for reading on-screen text. Because I use my iPad as much as my PC I wonder if you know of a similar app that I can use on my tablet.**

Edgar Moss

A You probably don't need an app, as Apple iOS – the mobile operating system that runs on iPads and iPhones – has several built-in accessibility features that'll make your tablet to talk to you.

To enable them, launch the Settings app, then tap General followed by Accessibility. While there are various text-to-speech items to explore here the one that's most like Balabolka is Speak Selection. Tap this then tap the Speak Selection switch to flip it to the on position (see screenshot).

The default voice is an English-accented male, but you can change this by tapping Voices. Note also the Speaking Rate slider here, which you can tweak later if you find your iPad is talking too quickly or slowly.



Turn on Speak Selection in the Accessibility settings to enable text-to-speech on your iPad

Now just select some text that you want your iPad to read. In Safari, for example, find a block of text, then press and hold it for a moment. If your iPad doesn't select exactly what you want, tap and drag the little blue bookend dots to expand or reduce the selection. Now look above the selected text and you'll see that your iPad has displayed three options – Copy, Define and Speak. Tap Speak, then sit back and listen.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 16 Sept

- Why is my display dark at the top and bottom?
- Has BT installed spyware on my laptop?
- Why does my PC fail to start?

...And many more

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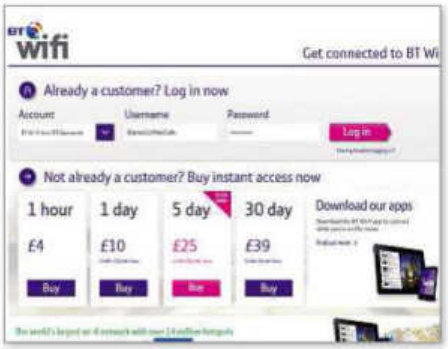
Laptops

Boost performance away from the mains, repair a faulty display, and fix sticky keys and typing glitches

Can't connect to Wi-Fi

Lots of things can cause Wi-Fi blocks. First, check that your laptop's Wi-Fi is actually switched on. There might be a small physical switch for this on your laptop, or it might be activated by holding down the Function (Fn) key while pressing a key with a Wi-Fi or antenna icon. Next, click the Wi-Fi icon in the Notification Area at the far right of your Taskbar, click your Wi-Fi network in the list, then click Connect. Type your network password if prompted. If you're using a public hotspot (in a cafe, for example), it often initially seems you can connect without a password, but chances are you'll need to log in via a web page when you launch your browser and try to visit a website. Ask the organisation running the hotspot for the login details.



Connected to a public hotspot? Launch your web browser to see a login page like this

No image or rotated display

If you can't see anything on your screen, you may have inadvertantly pressed a key combination that directs video images to your laptop's external display connector. Hold down the Function (Fn) key while tapping the display-switch key (one of the numbered F keys along the top). If the display is rotated or upside down, try pressing Control (Ctrl)+Alt+up arrow or Shift+Alt+up arrow to correct it.

Slow operation using battery

Many modern processors save energy by varying their speed, but this can lead to sluggish performance, especially if you're operating on battery power. You might

If your laptop performs slowly on battery power, tweak the Power Options in Control Panel

find BIOS options to disable this behaviour entirely (press F2 or Delete after switching on to access your BIOS), or go to your Control Panel, then Power Options. Select the 'High performance' button, then click 'Change plan settings' followed by 'Change advanced power settings'. Scroll through to find 'Processor power management' then experiment with the performance percentages for both 'Minimum processor state' and 'Maximum processor state' (see screenshot above) until you find the balance that's right for you.

Battery dies quickly or won't charge at all

If either of these happen, your battery might be nearing the end of its useful life cycle. Laptop batteries tend to be good only for a few hundred charges, which may equate to just a couple of years of use. Before shopping for a replacement, see if your laptop's manufacturer offers any kind of calibration tool. If not, try a manual calibration by charging your laptop fully, removing the power cable and then using the laptop (or leave it running) until it switches off or goes into hibernation. Then fully charge it once more.

Try calibrating a failing laptop battery before shopping for a replacement

Incorrect characters appear when typing

Many laptops have 'hidden' or 'soft' numeric keypads – like those on the right-hand side of a full-size keyboard – to make it easier to enter figures. If you activate this without realising, your keyboard will start to behave erratically. The fix is to tap the Number Lock or NumLock key (often represented by a numbered padlock icon). The key may be hidden itself, but you can activate it by holding down the Function (or Fn) key then pressing NumLock.

Can't switch laptop off after a crash

First, wait to see if Windows recovers by itself; it can sometimes take a long time and even when everything seems completely frozen, it can spring back into life. But when you're done waiting, merely switching it off at the mains won't work because your laptop has a battery. Therefore, the trick is to briefly disconnect the battery. This is typically achieved by releasing one or more sprung clips on your laptop's underside. Remove the battery unit for no more than a second or two, then pop it back in.

Keys don't work after spillage

Laptop keyboards don't have much travel, so any tiny crumb or spillage that falls between the cracks can easily jam up a key. If this happens, switch your laptop off and then use a flat-headed screwdriver to gently prise the affected key off its pedestal – it should pop off with very little force. Use a can of compressed air or a dry toothbrush to clean the underside and mechanism, then snap the key back in place.

Next issue Fast Fixes for... Your Microsoft account

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4	plusnet	Plusnet: Broadband & Calls	£9.99 (£2.50 for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£30.00

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In the next issue of our sister title Web User...

- **WEBSITES YOU SHOULD STOP USING!**
  10 popular websites that abuse their power with dodgy privacy policies and sneaky charges
- **CONTROL YOUR UPDATES**
  Stop unwanted updates messing up your PC
- **BUILD A RASPBERRY PI MEDIA CENTRE**
  Complete step-by-step instructions
- **AUTOMATE YOUR PC**
  Start and shut down your system automatically

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Jargon Buster

1080p Of the common types of high-definition video, this is the best quality: 1920x1080 pixels.

32bit A measure of how much information a computer can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

64bit A technology that processes information in larger chunks. Most modern computers are 64bit.

802.11ac A standard for wireless networks that allows for higher transfer speeds than 802.11n.

Auto-exposure Feature that automatically determines the best exposure settings when taking a photo.

Beta A version of software that's being tested. Beta versions are often released so problems can be ironed out.

BIOS Basic Input-Output System. Essential software built into every PC that connects the vital components.

Calibration The process of checking and adjusting a piece of equipment.

Contrast ratio A measure of the difference between the darkest and lightest possible shades shown by a screen.

Crowdfunding A process where a company gets the financing to launch a new product from prospective customers online.

DirectX 9 An older version of DirectX.

DisplayPort A new socket for connecting monitors that's still relatively rare.

DVI Digital Visual Interface. A common type of display connector that can carry a digital signal.

Emulator A program that makes one computer act like another, allowing it to run that PC's software.

Extension A program that adds extra features to your browser.

False positive When an antivirus program wrongly detects a malware infection.

Firmware Basic software stored on a device, such as a music player, to control its operation.

Flash memory A type of memory that can retain information without a power source.

Flash storage A data storage device that includes flash memory with an integrated USB interface.

GHz Gigahertz. A measure of how many instructions a chip can process per second.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits HD video signals.

HDR High-dynamic range. A camera that takes more than one photo with different levels of colour.

ISO file A type of image file that contains all the data from a CD or DVD disc.

Keylogging Recording everything someone types. Normally used to steal passwords.

LED Light-Emitting Diode. An electronic device that emits light.

Li-Ion Lithium Ion. A type of rechargeable battery used in most laptops and mobile phones.

Megapixel A measure of the amount of detail that can be recorded by a digital image.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

MicroUSB A miniature version of USB, often found on smartphones, tablets and portable hard drives.

Mini-ITX Low-powered motherboard, commonly used in high-end, home-theatre PCs and gaming PCs

MKV Matroska. An open source type of video file.

Motherboard The main circuit board inside every PC into which all other parts connect.

NTFS NT File System. A file system used by all recent versions of Windows.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone.

Parameter A rule defining how a particular command will run.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

PCI Express A faster version of PCI, used by modern graphics cards.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to your web browser or to other applications.

Processor The processor is the brain of a computer.

Product key Number to be typed in by the user before an application will launch for the first time.

Proprietary Ownership protected under a registered trade name

PUP Potentially Unwanted Program. A program that may not be desired, despite the user consenting to it being downloaded.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage.

RAW A format for digital photos that stores the image exactly as the camera captured it.

Remote code execution When a hacker is able to start a program running on a remote computer.

Resolution The amount of detail shown in an image, whether on screen or printed.

Retina Apple's marketing term for extremely high-res displays.

Rootkit Software that gives a malicious user administration rights and access to a computer.

Server A PC on a network, such as the internet, that distributes information to other PCs.

Source code Program instructions that are readable by people but not computers.

Spoofing A technique whereby hackers pose as legitimate websites, emails or IP addresses to gain access to sensitive data.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors, printers and the internet.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

System Reserved partition The partition your operating system creates for itself when you install it on a partitioned PC.

System restore point The collection of system files stored by System Restore on a given date.

Thread The smallest sequence of instructions that can be managed by your processor.

Traffic Data transmitted over a network.

Travel The distance the keys of a keyboard have to be pressed before the keystroke is recognised.

Trojan A malicious PC program that's disguised as a different, harmless program.

USB 2.0 Faster successor to USB that's used by devices such as external hard drives.

USB 3.0 An even faster version of the USB standard used to connect devices to a computer.

VGA Video Graphics Array. A standard socket for connecting a monitor to a computer.

Virtual drive A set of files seen by Windows as a separate hard drive.

Virus definitions A database of known viruses and other malware used by an antivirus program.

VPN Virtual Private Network. A technology for keeping all internet communication safe and private even on insecure networks.

Widget A small program that runs on PCs, phones and tablets.

Bust more jargon on our Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/14981

The Final Straw

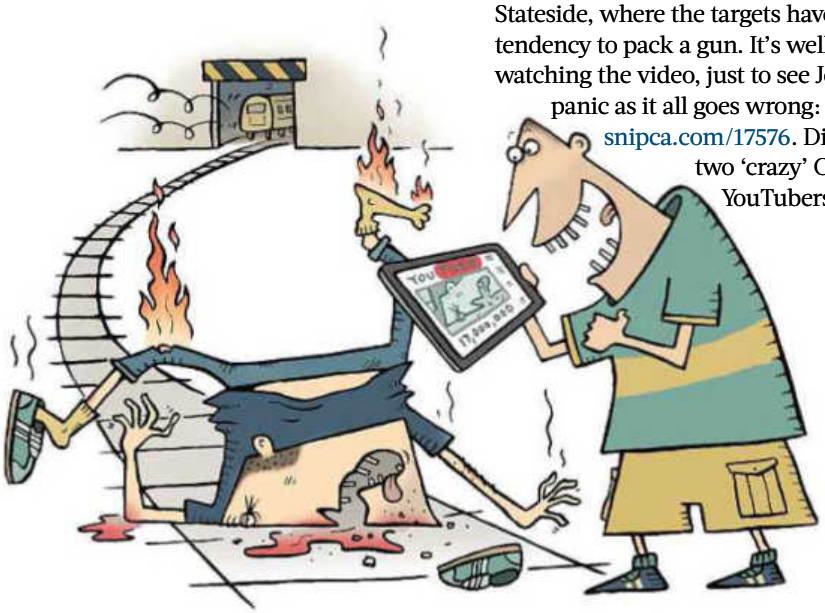
STUART ANDREWS is *Computeractive*'s Mr Angry

This issue Stuart Andrews isn't amused by. . .

Idiotic YouTube dares

In Issue 453, I expressed my fear that a steady stream of cute cat videos on YouTube was killing global productivity. Now, I'm beginning to wonder whether it might start killing off our kids. At the end of July Shah Faisal Shinwari, a popular YouTube vlogger ('video blogger'), had to be fished out of the Thames having jumped off Tower Bridge. He hit the surface hard, gulped several mouthfuls of dirty water and was nearly swept downriver. He only survived because he dragged himself to the side where rescuers could pump the so-called water from his lungs and stomach. This 'dare' was uploaded to YouTube for the world to watch.

I won't be the first to think 'what an idiot', or wonder about the intelligence of Shinwari and the 30,000-odd people who subscribe to his channel. But I do have to wonder if this is where our social media world is heading – to a place where the surest way to make your mark is risk your life. I don't blame YouTube. Google has no interest in encouraging young people to kill themselves; you can't gather data and flog them advertising when they're dead. Yet YouTube has created the world's finest public forum for morons.



Shinwari is just the tip of an idiocy iceberg. In June, a San Diego man was killed by a moving freight train while attempting to roll underneath it – apparently a YouTube stunt gone wrong. Several Russian vloggers have also met their end on moving trains. It turns out that when you're hanging out of a carriage or surfing on the top, you really do need to watch out for those tunnels.

> "YouTube has created the world's finest public forum for morons"

Some YouTube pranksters pick the wrong target. British vlogger, Jack Jones, kept his followers amused by jumping into strangers' cars and filming what happened. Stupidly, Jones took his act Stateside, where the targets have a nasty tendency to pack a gun. It's well worth watching the video, just to see Jones panic as it all goes wrong: www.snipca.com/17576. Ditto for two 'crazy' Czech YouTubers, who had a classy gag pretending to relieve their bowels on luxury cars in the US. They even used their own plastic faeces. This isn't a great idea in a country where the owner's might have tasers and a temper.

I'm not so worried about the YouTube daredevils and pranksters – it's their life, and if they want to end it shot, crushed, splattered or drowned in the pursuit of momentary fame, then that's their look-out. I do worry, though, about the various dumb, impressionable souls who imitate them. In 2013, a man died trying to swing through a sandstone arch in Utah, copying a YouTube video that had racked up some 18 million views. In June this year, a 47-year-old man from Oakland, California died while holding a firecracker to his head, again aping some YouTube stunt.

Meanwhile, wave after wave of stupid challenges have spread around the world, ranging from the cinammon challenge (swallow a spoonful of ground cinnamon in less than a minute without water – possible side effects include vomiting and inhaling burning powder) to the ice bucket challenge (pour salt on skin, place ice on top, enjoy third-degree burns). I've actually seen people I know on Facebook – men and women in their forties – doing 'Neknomination' challenges, where you pick some ridiculous cocktail then dare a friend to down it in one.

I know what you're thinking. There have always been stupid thrill-seeking kids, and is this really any different from running across the railway lines or playing 'chicken' on the dual carriageway – both favourite pursuits of buffoons when I was young?

Yet the lure of that 15 minutes of YouTube fame has a wider reach and a more pernicious grasp. Some people will go to great lengths to prove to the world how stupid they are.

Do you agree with Stuart? Let us know at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue Stuart is frightened by misbehaving mice

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